ELSIE OXENHAM



THE SCHOOL OF UPS AND DOWNS



By ELSIE OXENHAM

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They had always ‘done things together.’

THE SCHOOL OF UPS AND DOWNS: THE STORY OF A SUMMER CAMP

BY

ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

Author of
'A School Camp Fire,' 'The Tuck-Shop Girl,' 'At School with the Roundheads,' &c.

Illustrated by H. C. Earnshaw

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DEDICATED

WITH LOVE AND BEST WISHES

TO

MY LITTLE ‘BESTEST FRIEND’

‘RIBBY’

(REGINALD WILLIS WILSON)

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CHAPTER I.
LIBBY AND TIBBY

'Now what shall it be for our last day in town?' Mr Mackenzie asked at breakfast-time.

'A bus-ride! Oh, a long one, father!' Tib spoke first, her face and voice eager. Tib generally spoke first, though she was eighteen months the younger.

'What do you say, Libby?'

Lib's answer came swiftly. No one had seen the momentary eagerness in her eyes also, and it had died almost before Tibby had spoken. 'I say a bus-ride too, father. I think they're awfully nice. Couldn't we take one of those that goes right out into the country?'

'Oh, but I want to go to the Bank!' Tib insisted. 'It's far more fun. The country's slow.'

'Oh, all right! I don't mind.' Lib had been trying to make the best of a bad business, for motor-buses were not her choice, but she yielded so quickly that Tib did not suspect her.

'The Bank, my dear Tibby?' their mother laughed. 'Why the Bank? What fascination has the Bank for you? I seem to think we've been there by bus before.'

'I love it! Not the Bank itself, of course; that's duller than dull. I was frightfully disappointed when I saw it first. But I mean all that part where all the roads and tubes meet, and everything seems to be going to run into everything else. I just love watching it from the top of a bus. I wish we could have lived in a hotel just there!'

'I don't!' Mrs Mackenzie laughed. 'And I'm quite sure father and Lib don't!'

'Piccadilly Circus is nearly as good. Trafalgar Square's too big. I like to see it all squashed together.'

'Tib, you'd make a regular Londoner in no time! But as it's our last day, I suppose we must spend it as you wish.'

'Oh, but you'll all like it too, won't you?' Tib asked anxiously. There was a shade of doubt in her face as she looked at her sister. 'You'll like it, Libby? You don't want to go poking about empty old dead buildings on our last day, do you? Of course, I know we had to go and see them. It's the proper thing. We couldn't stop a whole week and only go for bus-rides. But on our last day'—— To her mind, Westminster and Southwark and the Temple could not be compared with the joys of her favourite pastime.

'They aren't dead, and they aren't empty!' Lib retorted with spirit. 'Nobody could call the Abbey either! Why, it's alive! And every bit of it's full of—of—something; I'm not sure what. But it isn't empty!'

'Oh, it's full of names and dates, of course! I got a frightful headache there.'

'Father, what is it Westminster's full of?' Libby asked.

'Atmosphere—romance—memories—history, Libby. But only to those who are awake to them.'

'I'm not!' Tib said frankly. 'I think it's all silly.'

'I'm quite aware of that,' her father laughed. 'You find your romance out in the streets and traffic, don't you? Come, then! Let's go and find our bus. It may take us some time, if we have to wait for front-seats. You wouldn't prefer a taxi?'

'No—oh no! They aren't half the fun! They're not so high, for one thing!'

'I quite understand,' he laughed. 'Very well. We'll go to the Bank, and change there, and come back by Ludgate Hill and the Strand and Piccadilly. That should satisfy you. I have an appointment in the afternoon.'

As they sat in their front-seats on the bus, sometimes crawling, sometimes rushing along Oxford Street, Lib, sitting by her father, was very thoughtful, her brows knit in a troubled

frown. She knew he did not want to talk; his dreamy eyes were not seeing the crowded thoroughfare before them any more than were her own. On the other seat Tib was chattering excitedly to her mother. Lib felt free to think and, if she must, to worry.

She had tried to keep one thought at bay during all this exciting week in London. But it had been there, and had been growing stronger each day. She had felt it dimly before, but suddenly she had become acutely conscious of its truth. And she could not speak of it, even to her parents.

She and Tib were different. That was all the trouble. Their tastes were different; they found pleasure in different ways. And Lib was beginning to fear that in time this division might lead them far apart.

They had always been so much to one another. They had always 'done things together.' There had been little choice at home. All their lives they had lived at the head of one of the great sea-lochs of the Clyde, which looked like a lake set in an unbroken ring of mountains two thousand feet high, but where the salt water and rising and falling tide told of an outlet to the sea away at the southern end, where no gap was visible. A mile away from the whitewashed cottages by the pier, Libby and Tib had lived in a big gray house draped in creeper and roses, and surrounded by gardens. With their parents and governess, they were the whole family, and now Lib was nearly fifteen and Tib thirteen and a half.

They had done the same things, of course. There had been nothing else to do. They had rowed and ridden, walked and climbed, bathed and paddled, gardened and cycled, had learned the same lessons and read the same books. They were much alike to look at, and both very like their father in appearance, with the golden-red hair and delicate skin so typical of real Scottish girls, and big brown eyes, and freckles. But Tib's hair hung round her face and shoulders in rings and curls inherited from her mother, and was not long, though thick. Lib's hung to her waist in a long mane tied back with ribbons, with a little wave in it, but no curls. Their mother was tall and dark, and would laughingly add a touch of pink or scarlet to her dress, since she was the only one of the family who could do so, while she dressed the girls in blue or brown.

Whatever their parents might have thought, the girls had only lately begun to suspect that they were not as much alike in nature as in looks. Even now the idea had hardly occurred to Tib; and though Libby had discovered the fact, she was still struggling not to admit it even to herself, for the very idea of anything coming between them caused her keen distress.

She had caught faint hints of it in the past. They had visited Glasgow, and it was a recognised family joke that Tib could only be dragged away from Sauchiehall Street by the bribe of tram-rides all over the city, while to Lib Glasgow centred in the Cathedral, and particularly the Crypt, with its shadows and heavy arches and carved pillars. In Edinburgh it had been the same; the romance of the High Street had captured Libby, and she had explored closes and wynds and stairs with her father, while Tib had been all for Princes Street—not for the sake of its shops, but because of its life, its crowds, the constant sight of soldiers, the cable cars. Tib liked the Gardens when the band was playing; Lib revelled in a long ramble on the Pentlands. Lib preferred St Giles' when she and her parents and Tib were its only visible occupants; Tibby enjoyed the early Sunday service for the soldiers.

But these visits to the cities had been rare, and the girls had always gone home to their loch, to do the same things and almost forget that strange little fact of their differing tastes which Lib feared might some day not seem so little after all.

She was more like her father in nature. Their present house had been his home all his life, and his family had lived in it for generations. His tastes were all towards literature, and he had published several little volumes of poems, which had given pleasure to himself and, judging from the letters he received, to many others also. Mrs Mackenzie had been a London girl, but

had settled happily in her Highland home, without losing the power to enjoy an occasional taste of city life. Lib began to see dimly that Tib was like their mother and she like their father, and she wondered fearfully to what in time this might lead them.

Their differing tastes had been very marked during this week in London. Tib was all for the excitement and bustle of the streets, Lib for the atmosphere of romance in ancient buildings to which she was so sensitive. It had caused their parents amusement and some embarrassment, for they were anxious to do justice to both girls, and it was not always easy. It was made easier, however, by Libby's keen distress over the difference between them. Talk of it, acknowledge it in words, she would not. She would hardly admit it even to herself. She was always ready to declare she wanted to do the thing on which Tibby's heart was set, and unwilling to express her own wishes. It was only as a matter of course their mother insisted on their visiting Westminster, forgetting their previous experiences of Scottish cities; but Lib's rapt delight in the chapels, cloisters, and chapter-house reminded her, and she curbed Tib's impatience—with difficulty, to be sure, for Tib was frankly bored—so that Lib should have her fill of romance for that day, at least. After that, she took care to combine with the incessant bus-rides for which Tib craved, visits to Southwark or St Giles' or St Bartholomew's; and if Tib found these wearisome, at least they were holy ground to Libby. It would have been easier to take the girls sight-seeing separately, but with her whole heart Lib shrank from that, and would not consider the idea for a moment. She would have sacrificed everything of interest in London rather than go about without Tibby.

It was her father who, understanding her thoroughly, gave his elder daughter one more series of memories of London, unusual and original, but lasting. One afternoon, after a long bus-ride through the East End, he left Tibby and her mother to find their way home by various motor-buses, and asked Lib to keep him company while he went to visit his publishers. Leading her down Fleet Street, he dived suddenly under an ancient archway like a tunnel, and introduced her to the Temple Gardens. He showed her the Lamb bearing the Banner, and the Flying Horse, and explained them; took her into the church, told her its stories, and pointed out the beauties of the doorway; and led her through the courts for a first rapid visit, so that she should understand that these private-looking doorways were really public entrances to new courts and gardens named after trees and pumps. Then he left her for an hour, to wander as she pleased, and found her when he returned not only not bored, but in love with the curious old place.

'I like the quietness of it, with all that noisy Fleet Street just out there through those tunnels,' she said radiantly.

So, when he went to call on another firm in Paternoster Row, he first took her to Little Britain—whose name delighted her—and left her in the Postman's Park; and when he had to make a call in Holborn he introduced her to the green spaces of Lincoln's Inn Fields; and she said again, 'I do like these quiet little gardens hiding in among all the houses and noise and business! They don't seem real, somehow; they look as if they'd been enchanted and put to sleep for a hundred years, so that they couldn't ever change. I don't know, either! When I'm in one of them, it's all the noise out in the streets that doesn't seem real; it's all so far away, while the garden seems the only real thing. I like the way you come on a garden suddenly round a corner or under an arch. I'm going to remember the London gardens, father.'

So to-day they left Mrs Mackenzie and Tib at St Paul's, to finish the bus route, and Mr Mackenzie went by taxi to keep his appointment with a friend in Chancery Lane, and, as usual, invited Libby to go with him, 'for company.' He dismissed the taxi at the Holborn end, took her hand, and turned in under another wide arch, with an old wood-fronted house above.

'Another tunnel-way to fairyland!' he laughed. 'You shall wait for me here. This is Staple Inn.'

‘Oh!’ breathed Libby at sight of the square paved court, high old houses, and five great plane-trees queening it over the quiet yard. Already she had learned to love the plane-trees of London.

Her father led her on, however, through a passage opposite the entrance, and left her there, with a laugh of understanding for her rapturous face. For here, within high railings, were beds of wallflower, gorgeous masses of gold and brown and red, and rows of stiff tulips, proud of their brilliant cups, and sweet-spiked hyacinths; and between the crowding flowers were little tiled paths, with grass growing between the tiles; and in one corner was water, a narrow pond with ferns and lily-leaves, in another a tiny rock-garden. On all sides were high houses looking down on the little oasis; from the garden rose the heavy warm scent of hyacinths and wallflowers to the busy windows above; outside the enclosure were more graceful sheltering planes. The roar of Holborn could hardly be heard; but for the high walls and windows it might have been some little retired garden in the grounds of a country mansion. Libby wandered round and round, peering through the railings from every point—out to rest on the seats under the biggest plane-tree in the outer court, and to feed the sparrows with crumbs of biscuit—back to the inner garden for another look at the pond or the wallflowers—and greeted her father radiantly when he returned.

‘This is the prettiest city garden yet! I’ll never forget Staple Inn, father!’

‘Ah, but you should see it in July, when the delphiniums are banks of blue!’ said he. ‘I discovered it years ago, and brought your mother here. But I did not think Tibby would care about it. She would say it was slow;’ and he laughed.

A shadow crossed Libby’s face. There it was again! To her it was no laughing matter.

Then she brightened suddenly. To-morrow they were going into the country again, and things would be as they always had been. It had always been all right in the country. Only in town was there so much choice that they were tempted to take different ways. A shadowy fear that perhaps this time their tastes had developed and diverged so completely that the difference could never be quite forgotten, she stifled bravely and hastily. To-morrow they were going on, and in the country all would be well. They would forget motor-buses and London gardens; there would be fields and hills, and they would walk, and work, and explore together as of old. In spite of the charm of Staple Inn, she was glad they were going on to-morrow.

On, not back. They had left the Scottish home for some time, at least. Mr Mackenzie, after several winters of ill-health, had consulted a Glasgow doctor, and been peremptorily ordered to a drier climate for the next two or three winters. The hills, as every one called the mountains around the loch, were beautiful, of course, but they did bring down the rain. Sunshine and less damp were imperative for him, and he must winter in the south of England for some years. It had been a great wrench to leave home, especially for himself; but there had been no choice.

As to where they should go, there had not been much choice either. Mrs Mackenzie had long wished to send the girls to the big boarding-school at which she had been educated, and this stood high on the Sussex Downs, near a watering-place which advertised its ‘sunny’ character even on Scottish hoardings. But the journey had seemed too great, and she had been considering the choice of a school nearer home when the doctor’s verdict opened the way. They would take a house on the sunny Downs, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the school; and presently, when the girls had grown used to the change of surroundings and climate, they should go to it, and yet be able to come home occasionally. They would not feel they were parted from their parents by hundreds of miles, and more than a day’s journey, and Mr Mackenzie would have all the sunshine and fresh breezes from the Downs.

The girls both shrank a little from the thought of school; they had never lived away from home, or mixed much with other girls. Their mother, as she made inquiries and fixed on a

house not many minutes' walk from the school, near the village she had known so well in her girlhood's days, hoped that they would gradually lose their dread of the new life as they grew familiar with the look of the school and its girls. Perhaps they might even find a chance to make friends with some of them, and that would ease their way greatly.

So, as they left their hotel next morning, they were bound for a new home and a new life, and Lib felt very nearly convinced that all the troubling thoughts she had kept so rigidly to herself would cease to burden her in the excitement of exploring the Downs, the village, and the sea-shore; in the joy of the new home, the new garden, and new friends.

CHAPTER II.
A TRAIN FULL OF GIRLS.

Libby and Tib stood watching the bustle of the big station with interested eyes. Tib had begged that they might go early, as there was always so much to see; so, while their parents collected the luggage, they were left to watch the crowds. In so complete a removal from home, much luggage had been necessary. Some had gone in advance, and more had been sent across London to await them at the station. Now it had all to be gathered together, labelled, and sent to the right train, and the waiting girls had time to see and hear much.

A Red Cross train came quietly in, and the crowd surged towards it to watch the ambulances setting out for the hospitals. A detachment of khaki lads, very raw and pink-faced, and evidently fresh from offices and shops, marched through on their way to some training-camp, trying to pretend they were a draft for the front, and to look much smarter than they really were. A train arrived from the coast, and let out a stream of bronzed, eager boys, home on leave, all hurrying off in various directions, joking and jostling one another.

Then Libby and Tib moved a few steps away from their position under the clock, for it was evidently the trysting-place for another party. As the clock reached half-past two, schoolgirls began to flock in that direction, till a score were assembled in the care of a short, energetic, fair-haired mistress. More girls arrived; the chatter and laughter increased; parents in the background said good-bye to their daughters, who joined the rest looking sober for a moment, but were soon laughing with the others. Still more came to swell the throng, and presently the whole party moved towards the departure platform.

'There won't be much room for any one else in that train!' Tib remarked. 'Don't they make a row? I wish we could have heard what it was all about!'

'Oh, here's mother! I wonder if we're going by that train too.'

To their great satisfaction, this proved to be the case. When they reached the platform they found the schoolgirls being marshalled into a reserved corridor carriage, and Tib promptly annexed the one next to it for their use.

'In here, mother! Oh, please do! Perhaps they'll find it too much of a squash in there, and some of them will come in here.'

Her mother laughed. 'I don't think that's likely. Are you interested in them, then, Tibby?'

'Only curious. I want to know what they talk about all the time.'

'Oh, the holidays—what they've all been doing—and what they're going to do this term! We've evidently chosen the first day of term, without knowing it.'

'I never saw so many girls together before,' said Lib. 'I suppose their hats are all alike to show people they belong.'

'They're rather jolly hats,' Tib said critically, eyeing them from her corner window.

The hats in question came along at that moment on the heads of two more girls. They were wide-brimmed soft straws, not the old-fashioned stiff sailors, trimmed with scarves of brown with a narrow crimson stripe. The girls for the most part wore coats and skirts of navy blue, and all had brown stockings and shoes.

The last arrivals were greeted by the fair-haired mistress with an anxious question. 'Here you are at last, girls! Have you seen anything of Rose and Sybil? They were to come by this train.'

'We didn't see them, Miss Betts. Perhaps they'll come by the later one; they often do.'

'Well, get in here. I'll watch for them till the last minute. They'd come to join us when they found we had gone, of course.'

‘Oh yes!—Oh, what a squash! What packs of you there are!’ cried one of the new-comers indignantly, evidently finding the carriage uncomfortably full.

Miss Betts went up the platform looking anxiously for her lost sheep, and girls’ heads appeared at all the windows, offering suggestions to one another, but not to her.

‘Betty needn’t be worried. Rose is big enough to look out for herself, surely.’

‘She is worried, though. She doesn’t like this job.’

‘Well, I think Rose might have come in time to help her. It is a big job for one; she ought to have a senior to help.’

‘And Betty’s such a little one! It’s not as if she was tall and imposing, like Miss Helen or Madam.’

‘Oh, but she’s energetic!’ another laughed. ‘I hope Rose and Sybil won’t come! We’re all sitting in one another’s laps already.’

‘Get out and jump in next door, then.’

Lib and Tib looked at one another hopefully. But the hope died at the swift response.

‘No fear! Not likely! Besides, Betty’d have me out in half a tick. Here she comes; the whistle’s just going. No Roses by this train!’

The girls threw open the door, and Miss Betts joined them, then looked to make sure no wanderers turned up as the train started. Libby and Tib, much interested, were at their window also. And at that moment a whole party of girls, as it seemed, came flying along the platform.

‘No, no, girls! You’re too late! Don’t attempt to get in!’ cried Miss Betts.

But Libby had flung her door wide, pushing Tib down on to the seat. ‘Get in here! We’ve heaps of room. You can change later.’

The girls sprang in, the last one caught and pulled into safety by Mr Mackenzie. She was a big girl, who had stayed to hustle a smaller one up the step in front of her.

‘That was a very risky thing to do,’ he said severely.—‘Elizabeth, you should not have opened the door.’

‘But they’d have been left behind!’ cried Lib.

‘They deserved to be left behind. They might have been under the train.’

‘Thank you very much for helping us. We really didn’t realise the train had started. We thought we still had time,’ the elder girl said earnestly. Then, with a sudden change of manner, ‘Are you kids all right? Did you bump yourself, Sybil? I guess Sammy knows how to jump even on to a moving train. All right, Sam?’

‘I’m all right.’ A younger girl still sitting on the carriage floor rubbed her knees as she spoke. ‘I jumped all right, but I tripped over something. Who was it?’

‘Me—I—my feet, I mean,’ laughed Tib Mackenzie.

‘Oh, sorry! I didn’t mean to.’ She picked herself up, and they all dropped into seats at the farther end of the carriage.

Libby and Tib eyed them curiously, Tib in frank interest, Lib in occasional quick glances up from the magazine she held. The elder girl who had apologised for their hasty entrance, and the younger one who had tripped over Tib—was it ‘Sammy’ she had been called?—were evidently sisters. There was a close resemblance between them in features and expression, and both had bright chestnut hair, the elder girl’s worn in a long thick plait, the younger’s cut straight across her forehead and round her neck in the American style for little children, so that under her big school hat she hardly seemed to have more hair than a boy. The other two were darker, and since the little one was Sybil, the tall one was probably Rose.

They had not all four come far together, however. As soon as they had recovered their breath three of them began to talk at once, in low tones at first; but they soon forgot they were not alone, and Lib and Tib looked across at one another and smiled.

‘Where have you and Sammy come from, Rowena?’ Rose demanded. ‘You’ve no business here! What have you been doing in London? I nearly fainted when I saw you tearing down the platform!’

Rowena laughed. ‘You don’t generally have the pleasure of our company on the way down, do you? We’ve been spending a few days with aunty in Hampstead—Sammy and I, and the boys. The boys went home this morning. They wouldn’t wait for us when they heard we meant to come by the school train. I think they were scared.’

‘As if the girls would have had time to look at them!’ Sammy said scornfully.

‘I suppose we’d better get in there at Clapham.’

‘I don’t see why we should. There’s sure to be packs of them,’ said Rowena.

‘I’m not going in there with Betty, to be rowed for catching the train!’ Sammy said warmly. ‘Why should we? Weena and I needn’t, anyway. We’re not travelling with her. We just happen to be going home by the same train, that’s all.’

‘Oh, Betty’s all right!’ Rowena argued. ‘I thought you’d want to be with the others, Sam.’

‘I don’t want to be with any stuffy old mistress a minute sooner than I need.’

‘You’ve bashed your hat, Samanthy,’ her sister observed.

Sammy switched it off, with a jerk of the elastic which endangered her ears, and did her best to repair damages to the crushed brim.

Rose looked at her severely. ‘You haven’t begun to let your hair grow yet, Samanthy. I thought you promised you would these holidays? You look an awful kid for fourteen.’

‘Oh, bother!’ Samanthy tossed back her thick, short locks. ‘It would be silly to begin having it long in the summer. Any one can see that. Perhaps I will next term. When it does get long it will be frightfully hot, for it’s going to be just like Weena’s, and I’m sure hers is too heavy for words.’

‘You get used to it,’ Rowena assured her solemnly.

‘I wonder you let her call you Weena,’ Rose remarked. ‘It’s hideous.’

‘Let me!’ mocked Samanthy, still smoothing the brim of her damaged hat.

‘If it wasn’t that it would be something else, and very likely something worse! We live on nicknames in our family. There’s no reasonable “short” for my name, so I have to put up with what I get.’

‘Doesn’t she ever call you Tanpa?’ So far as Libby and Tib could hear, that was what Rose said.

Rowena looked at her with raised eyebrows. ‘Of course not! Sammy? I wouldn’t allow it. She wouldn’t do it, anyway.’

‘No, I suppose she wouldn’t. Don’t you find it awkward, though, belonging to different things?’

‘Not a bit. We’ve each got what suits us. It’s a jolly good plan. I’m not like Sammy, and she’s not like me. We have to do different things.’

Libby Mackenzie had forgotten her magazine and was listening breathlessly, her eyes very wistful as she watched Rowena’s face. Was it foolish, then, to try so hard to keep herself and Tib one in their interests and enjoyments? Was it necessary that they should do different things and go separate ways? These sisters were nearly as close in age as she and Tibby, if it were true that Samanthy was fourteen: she did not look much more than twelve. Rowena could not be more than sixteen, so perhaps there was only a couple of years between them, but they seemed content to be separated, and even, apparently, to be known to their friends by names which they did not care to use for one another. That seemed very queer. Libby continued to listen, much puzzled, for it was plain there was nothing private about this conversation.

‘Been busy in the hols.?’ Rowena asked casually. ‘I say, Rose, I’ve made myself a dress! Yes, really—cut it out and all! It’s a linen frock for the summer.’

‘Good for you! I’ve been having cooking lessons from mother. I want some orange honours frightfully—the colour’s so lovely. I’ve done quite a lot.’

‘Miss Helen will be pleased. She’s keen on us working up our orange, and you hadn’t many. And I’ve cycled forty miles twice over—that’s eighty—and walked forty! That’s what comes of fine weather in the holidays.’

Rose whistled. ‘You have been going it, Tanpa! We live in town, so we can’t get much of that kind of thing.’

‘Oh, well, I’m lucky, of course! We’re out with the boys on the Downs all the time. I’ve washed and ironed a muslin frock, too.’

‘Guess I’ll have to get in with the others at Clapham, after all,’ Samanthy said suddenly. She had taken no part in the conversation, but had been eyeing Tibby and Lib curiously. ‘If you two are going to talk honours all the way, it will be awfully slack for me. I want somebody to talk to, too.’

‘There’s Sybil,’ Rowena suggested, glancing at the younger girl, who had not spoken since they entered the carriage.—‘You aren’t going to be shy of Sammy and me again, are you, Syb? I thought you’d got over that.’

Sybil coloured and smiled shyly, and Rose said encouragingly, ‘She’ll be all right presently. It’s only for the first few minutes she’s silly. Syb’s no use to Sammy, Rowena. Sam wants a Guide.—You’d better change, Samanthy; here we are!’

Sammy put on her hat hastily as the train drew up. Before she could reach the door, however, Miss Betts appeared at the window. ‘Are you girls all right?—Rose, you should have known better than to get in when the train had started.’

‘Quite all right, thank you, Miss Betts. May Sammy come in with you? She wants some one to talk to.’

Miss Betts seemed to understand without further explanation why Sammy could not be satisfied with her present company. She hesitated, however. ‘We are very crowded. I think you should stay where you are, Samanthy.—How is it you are here, Rowena?’

Rowena explained. Before she had finished there was a shout from Sammy, who had been looking rebellious. ‘Dorothy! Cicely! Phyllis! Oh, come in here, do! There’s no room next door.—May they come, Miss Betts? You said you hadn’t any room.’

Down the platform, looking for the reserved school carriage, came three fair-haired sisters wearing the school hats. They greeted Sammy with an answering shout.

‘Samanthy! Whatever are you doing here? Oh, we’ll come in with you!’ Evidently they were friends.

Miss Betts hesitated again. ‘There are eight in the carriage already’——

‘We can sit closer,’ Libby Mackenzie spoke up, a touch of shy colour in her face as they all turned to look at her. ‘If Tib and I sit on the same side there’ll be room for six.’

‘Or I could sit in Lib’s lap!’ Tibby added eagerly.

‘It’s awfully good of you!’ Sammy said warmly. ‘I do want them in here, for they’re Guides, like me, and we’re all in the same patrol, and we’ve heaps to talk about after the holidays.’

‘It’s very kind of you. If you are quite sure it won’t crowd you too much?—Jump in quickly, then, girls!’ and as soon as she had closed the door safely upon them Miss Betts had to hurry back to her own carriage.

CHAPTER III.
NAMES AND NICKNAMES.

'There seem to be altogether too many of us to-day!' Rowena laughed, as the new-comers greeted them all warmly, and demanded the reason of Sammy's presence there.

'It's always a bit of a squash by this train. Not nearly so many come by the later one.'

'Sammy and I are extras, of course. She'll be quite happy now she has you three to jabber to. She's been drilling small village kiddies all the holidays, in case she should be made corporal some day,' Rowena laughed. 'I don't think Madam will choose her yet, though.'

Samanthy was talking at express speed with the three fair-haired sisters. Rowena looked at Libby, who by the rearrangement of seats was now next to her.

'Forgive my asking, if it's rude, but are you two really Lib and Tib? It sounds almost too good to be true!'

Lib smiled, then laughed. 'We truly are. But I'm really Elizabeth, of course, and Tibby is Isobel.'

'Oh, I see! I couldn't think where you got them from. Then we're not the only family that goes in for nicknames! Yours are very pretty ones.—And not only their names!' Rowena added in an undertone to Rose, as she turned to her again. 'Isn't their hair lovely?'

'The little one has jolly curls. They are pretty,' Rose agreed.

'I like the wavy way the big one's hangs, and the colour! And those big brown eyes! They remind me of something—I know! Our big sandy cat at home! She's reddy-gold, with great yellow-brown eyes. These girls are just the same colour.'

'I don't suppose they'd thank you for that!'

'Oh, but she's a dear!—And what have you been doing in the hols., Tchikash?' Rowena turned to Sybil, with the obvious intention of drawing her into the conversation.

Libby and Tib stared again, knowing themselves forgotten once more. By what possible development of a nickname could Sybil become Tchikash, or Rowena Tanpa? And presently they discovered that Rose was known to Rowena as Nyoda, or occasionally Rainbow. On the other hand, Sammy and her friends never used these curious nicknames, and apparently had none themselves. There was something very mysterious about this school. Their mother saw their eager faces, and, knowing whence the schoolgirls came, was amused and satisfied.

Sybil answered shyly, 'I've been cooking too. We did it together. We've made bread and cakes and biscuits.'

'Goody! I hope Uda will make you make them again for her to see, so that we can all taste them. Anything else?—Nyoda, haven't you won any red honours at all?' Rowena asked severely.

'Not one. It isn't easy when you live in town. We must get our red ones at school, that's all.' Rose accepted Nyoda as her name, just as Sybil had Tchikash.

'I've learned to do crochet,' Sybil said shyly. 'I'm going to make three things, Tanpa.'

'Good for you!' Rowena said heartily. 'Sammy's been swotting all the holidays too. She's been all over the place with the boys, asking all kinds of questions. I really don't know what it was all about, but she knows every single thing about our part of the country for miles round. She knows the ordnance map like a book.'

'I had to make one for myself,' Sammy explained to Cicely. 'It's for the Pathfinder badge, of course. It was jolly interesting, but there's heaps to learn. The town's crammed with hospitals, and you have to be able to guess at the number of patients. 'Tisn't easy at first. I've been doing War Service at one of them—washing up for hours and hours.'

‘I mean to get my Harp for music this term,’ said Phyllis. ‘Madam said I was nearly good enough last term.’

‘I’ve been looking after our kiddies in the holidays,’ said Dorothy. ‘We’ve three under six, so one of us ought to be qualified as Child Nurse! I’ve a signed statement from mother that I did it properly; and she taught me all about making poultices, and using a thermometer, and darning their clothes, so I think I ought to get my Green Cross.’

‘I mean to get my Scissors too,’ Sammy declared. ‘I had to do something on wet days. Of course, I’ve made my own skirt and knickers, but’——

‘Samanthy!’ laughed Rowena. ‘Don’t discuss your undergarments in public!’

‘Oh, well’—— Sammy reddened, and looked at Mr Mackenzie, who seemed deep in the morning paper.

‘I’m more keen on what we’re going to do this term,’ Dorothy began. ‘The chief thing this term is the camp, of course.—Rowena, is there any chance of our getting the old place again this summer? Have you heard if Miss Robinson’s seen the landlord yet?’

‘Oh, we must go there! Nowhere else could be as jolly!’ Cicely said warmly.

‘Besides,’ Phyllis added, ‘it would be so disturbing for Grey Edward if we went to a new place. He wouldn’t enjoy it a bit.’

Rose and Sybil looked at Rowena eagerly also. ‘Can you give us any hope? You’ve been on the spot all the holidays. Have you heard anything, Rowena?’

Samanthy groaned. ‘ ’Tisn’t only the landlord now. He’s bad enough, but at least we know him. It’s new people—strangers.’

‘The house is taken,’ Rowena explained. ‘The “To Let” boards disappeared soon after you’d gone for the holidays, and the whole place has been put in order again. It’s jolly to see it, after the awful state it was in all last summer. But they’ll have a frightful lot of weeding to do for a year or two. Perhaps they’ll be glad to have us to help.’

‘Then shall we be able to camp there again?’ Rose asked eagerly.

‘I don’t suppose Miss Robinson has been able to ask yet. The people haven’t arrived, you see. As soon as they’ve fairly settled down, I suppose she’ll write and explain. They’re expected this week.’

‘But, of course, if they’re pigs they may say no,’ Samanthy added. ‘It all depends. They may not be nice.’

‘Is there anywhere else we could camp, Rowena, if they won’t have us?’ Dorothy asked. ‘I’m frantically keen on camping. It would be too awful if we couldn’t have a camp at all this summer.’

‘There’s no place half so good. The stream’s so convenient there, and it’s such good water. We could lend you a field, but we haven’t a wood, and you’d have to come to the house for water.’

‘Rotten!’ said Sammy.

‘It wouldn’t be half as jolly,’ Dorothy said wistfully. ‘I do hope we can go back to the old place. It was just perfect in every way.’

‘And Great Britain and Grey Edward are so fond of it!’ Phyllis added.

‘Miss Robinson might ask if we might go for Edward’s sake,’ Cicely laughed. ‘Do you remember the thunderstorm last June?’

‘When we all had to bundle out of the tents and run for the barn!’ Phyllis added.

‘And Killooleet and Yallani—oh, sorry!’ cried Rose, as the others laughed. ‘When Doris and Elsa, I mean, didn’t come, and Miss Helen had to go back and bring them along.’

‘And found The Sparrow clasping Edward, who was stiff with fright! And Madam went to help,’ Rowena added. ‘It was awfully decent of her, for they weren’t her girls at all, and it was raining buckets.’

‘Oh, but Miss Helen paid her back that day Phyllis cut her foot paddling in the stream!’ Cicely said warmly. ‘Madam wasn’t there to look after it—do you remember? Phyl was camp orderly for the day, so she was left at home. The rest of us were route-marching on the Downs. Miss Helen bandaged Phyl’s foot beautifully, and some of your lot took on her work till we came home. It was jolly nice of you.’

‘I had to peel potatoes,’ Rowena laughed. ‘And Rose gathered wood for your fire, and Doris watched your kettle. Oh, we didn’t mind!’

All the way to the coast Lib and Tib listened with hungry ears to reminiscences of past camping experiences or plans for the coming summer. It was plain that Rowena, Rose, and Sybil belonged to one set of girls, and Sammy and the three fair-haired sisters to another, and that they did very different things and had very different amusements at the camp which they had all enjoyed so much; but the camp had included both parties, that was certain, and they had all been there together, and not at different times. But how could boarding-school girls go camping? It must be confessed there was no reference during the whole journey to arithmetic, history, or geography, though presently the talk returned to the mysterious ‘badges’ for which Samanthy and her friends had been working all the holidays, and the various ‘honours’ which Rowena, Rose, and Sybil intended to claim. These last were coloured, it appeared, judging from the references to ‘red, green, blue, and orange honours,’ and Libby and Tib were more mystified than ever. How could ‘honours’ be coloured?

Sammy and her friends were ruled over by some one called ‘Madam,’ to whom all doubtful points were referred; Rowena’s leader was ‘Miss Helen,’ and it was plain that all the girls had a great admiration for her. But if all her girls had weirdly curious nicknames, why had the others none? They addressed one another as ‘Phyl,’ ‘Cis,’ and ‘Sam;’ but these were ordinary compared with Tanpa, and Nyoda, and Tchikash, and Yallani, and Killooleet! And had Miss Helen no nickname herself? And who was ‘Grey Edward’? Tib inclined to the opinion that he was a pet of some kind.

Lib’s curiosity grew beyond all bounds. Tib was fascinated by Samanthy, whose evident refusal to let her hair grow had appealed to her strongly. Tib had always been half a boy, and apparently Sammy was a kindred spirit. But Libby was more attracted by Rowena, whose eyes and voice were kindly, and who took every possible chance to draw shy Sybil into the conversation.

As the train passed through the outlying houses of the coast town, the girls began to make preparations for arrival, finding handbags and tickets and umbrellas. Cicely discovered that she had lost her gloves, and had to crawl under the seat to find them, amid the jeers of the rest; and Samanthy began to pay attention again to the broken brim of her hat.

Mrs Mackenzie began to collect magazines and papers, and Mr Mackenzie to roll up rugs. Under cover of the confusion Libby ventured to touch Rowena’s arm. She might not get the answer she craved, but she was sure she would not be snubbed.

‘Will you tell me something? Oh, please do! What do all your funny names mean?’

Rowena had risen to lift an umbrella from the rack. She looked in astonishment into the younger girl’s face, then laughed. ‘Did you hear? But I suppose you couldn’t help it. Bother! We oughtn’t to have used those names. They’re strictly private. Please forget them all again! But it won’t do any harm for you to know what they mean, I suppose. I am Tanpa, The Silver Birch Tree. Nyoda is The Rainbow. Tchikash is a shy little bird that lives in the woods; doesn’t it suit Sybil?’

‘And doesn’t “Miss Helen” have a name too?’ Libby trembled at her own daring.

Rowena’s eyebrows rose. ‘You have been listening! But it was our fault, of course. Oh yes! She’s Uda. The Firefly. Now, good-bye! Sorry to have disturbed your journey so horribly!’

‘We’ve loved it,’ Lib said shyly. ‘Won’t you tell me why you have names and the others haven’t?’

‘Oh no, I couldn’t possibly! It would take hours, and we’re there. Good-bye!’

Girls seemed to pour out of the train on every side.

Mr Mackenzie said quietly, ‘Let them go, girls. We can’t hurry, because of all our baggage; and we have no need to, anyway. They will all be away in a few minutes.’

On the platform Dorothy, Cicely, and Phyllis were greeting the crowd from the school carriage, and Rose and Sybil were being teased because of their late arrival. Rowena and Samanthy were the centre of an excited mob for a moment also, but when Miss Betts began to hurry them all towards the waiting buses outside the station, Rowena stood back out of the crowd.

‘We’ll come along presently. We must go home first and give mother all aunty’s news, and row those boys for going without us.—Come on, Sam!’ and they went off together to the tram waiting outside the station.

‘Now we’ll take a taxi!’ said Mr Mackenzie when the girls had disappeared, and he had collected the luggage and given orders as to how it should be sent out. The new home, Woody Dean, lay near a village along the coast, some miles from the fashionable watering-place to which they had come.

‘I smell the sea!’ Tibby announced, as they whirled through the town. ‘What a jolly wind!’

‘I wonder where the school is,’ Libby pondered. ‘They had to drive, so it must be some way off. Or perhaps that was only because they all had bags to carry.’

‘The town is full of schools,’ her mother said casually. ‘Did you think they looked nice girls?’

‘Awfully!’ Lib’s tone was emphatic. ‘But I had heaps more questions to ask!’

‘Why didn’t you begin sooner, then?’ Tib demanded.

‘I didn’t like. I felt as if it was rather cheeky to ask any at all.’

‘It was, rather,’ her mother agreed. ‘After all, you didn’t really know them, did you? You could hardly expect them to answer questions.’

‘I thought perhaps Rowena would say it was no business of ours. Well, no, I didn’t; I knew she wouldn’t, but that was only because she looked so nice. Some people might have done.’

‘I’d have liked to ask Sammy what all that meant about “Pathfinders” and “Scissors,” and why Dorothy had been making poultices in the holidays, and who Grey Edward was! And now I suppose we’ll never see any of them again, so we shall never know!’

‘Oh, you never know your luck!’ Mr Mackenzie laughed. He had caught his wife’s eye while Libby and Tib were absorbed in the schoolgirls’ chatter, and had raised his eyebrows slightly. Her nod had satisfied him, but he took his cue from her and said nothing to reassure them as to possible future meetings with these new friends.

CHAPTER IV.
WOODY DEAN.

The way to Woody Dean lay by the sea, to Tibby's great delight—a white unshaded road winding along the cliffs between green banks, very hot and sunny and dusty to walkers, but delightful to motorists. Up and down it went—down into great hollows, up the other side like a switchback, with only a strip of green turf, soft and springy, to separate it from the chalk cliffs and dancing blue sea. On the other side were fields, stretching away to the Downs, and groups of farm buildings here and there; some of the fields were green, but others looked as if a giant mustard-spoon had been drawn across them—vivid glowing yellow, in great stripes and swaths, of charlock in full flower. The girls cried out in delight at the sight, and again when they passed a field of richest crimson lucerne, and another of delicate pink sainfoin. The air was very clear and pure, and the colouring of all these rainbow fields was brilliant.

'As if some one had spilt a paint-box!' Tib murmured. 'Doesn't that yellow dazzle?'

'It's just splashes of each colour in turn, like the heather at home, smudged all over the hills,' Lib added.

'"Smudged" isn't a pretty way to put it,' her mother laughed.

'And here's a field all white dots in among the green! What are they, mother? Didn't you live near here once?'

'I went to school near here.'

'Oh, will you show us your old school?'

'Some day, perhaps. Well, in about three minutes I may be able to,' Mrs Mackenzie laughed.

'Oh, shall we pass it?' Libby forgot the white spots in the corn in her eagerness.

'No; it's on the other side. Wait a moment! Now!—Stop just for a minute, please!' Mrs Mackenzie said to the driver.

They had come unexpectedly to the top of one of the sudden downward dips in the switchback road, and in the hollow before them lay a long, narrow village, mostly red-roofed, crushed between two shoulders of green down. At one end the cottages stood close to the sea; at the other, the village ended in green masses of woodland. Round an old square church tower of gray stone were great trees also, but the hills rising just above the houses on each side were bare and smooth and green, like the turf of the cliff-top.

'And where's our house? And where's your school? The girls spoke together.

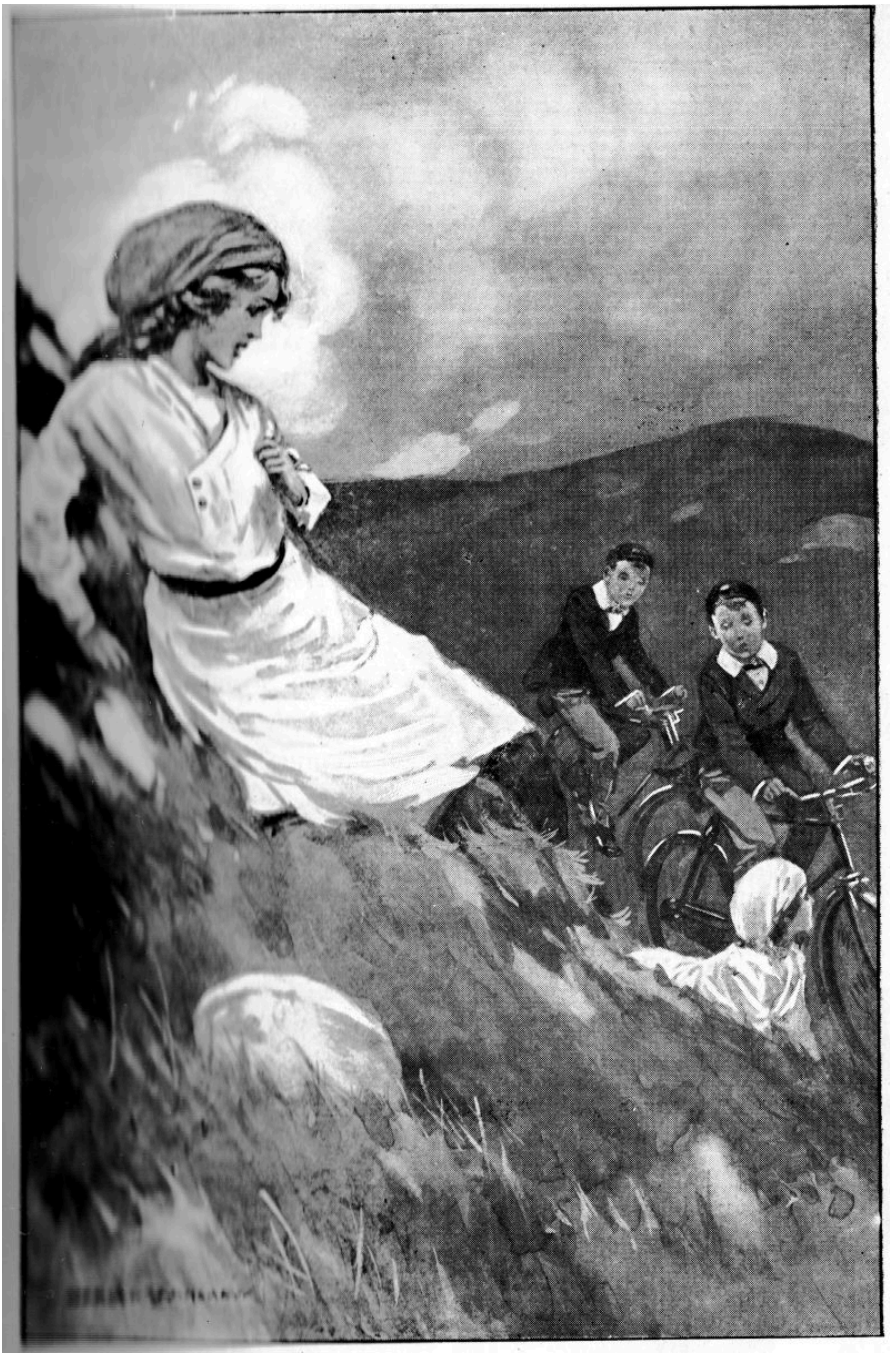
Their mother pointed to a big house standing high on the Downs above the village, every window standing wide open to the sun and sea-breezes. 'That's my old school. I've no doubt you will see the girls about the village or on the Downs. We were allowed out a good deal even in my time, and they probably have more liberty now, rather than less. You can't see our house from here.—Thank you!' to the driver. 'Now we will go on.'

'What a dear little, sweet little village!' Lib was gazing at the quaint old cottages, the low windows filled with geraniums and ferns or canaries in cages, the tiny shops, and the pavements of dull-red tiles.

Their driver, seeing them to be strangers, took them past the church for a first glimpse of the lich-gate, the village green, and the round pond, all sheltered and overhung by gigantic sycamore-trees, whose drooping blossoms were nearly a foot long. From there a lane running up a side valley of the Downs took them home, and they found Woody Dean, an old red house, surrounded by very ancient trees, and hung with close green creeper in which the wind

rippled up and down like waves, and where the maids, who had come in advance from Scotland, were waiting to welcome them.

Woody Dean was very quiet and lonely, the only house in its little dale, though only ten minutes' walk up the lane from the church, and was sheltered from the sea by a great green shoulder of down, over which the salt wind swept. Beyond the long, narrow garden—long and narrow of necessity, like the village, since the valleys were all long and narrow—was a dark belt of trees, on each side of a little stream, wandering down from the hills. Beyond these trees rose the rolling Downs, closing in the valley. Woody Dean was like a narrow, shallow basin scooped out of the chalky uplands. It caught all the sunshine, and the girls soon found themselves thankful for the shade of the sycamore woods at midday. All the breezes reached it also, and from whatever quarter they blew they came laden with the scent of thyme and turf, grasses and flowers, for from every quarter they blew from the hills. The south wind was heavy with salt as well, and often came tearing over the southern down with all the force of the Channel at its back. On those days the roaring of the breakers on the shingle could be heard at high tide even in Woody Dean; but other winds brought only the murmur of the trees, the hum of village life, or the ripple and splash of the stream.



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‘Tib!’ she shrieked, sitting up very suddenly. ‘Tibby! Tibby! Stop!’

Tib hung out of their bedroom window, which faced the great south down, while Lib brushed her long hair before tea.

'I like it! Oh, I'm so glad! Libby, I was just afraid'——

'I know.' Lib paused in tying her ribbon. 'I was a wee bit afraid too. But I didn't know you were. I'm glad we felt the same about it.'

'We always do,' said Tib, blind to the obvious truth that they did not. The mere fact that she should think so cheered Lib, however. 'What were you afraid of, Libby?'

'That we wouldn't like it; that we'd miss the hills and the loch; that it would be *hot*!'

Tib laughed. 'Yes, I know. The south of England sounds so stuffy, doesn't it? I never really thought there would be a wind worth living for down here.'

Lib tied her ribbon, and came and leaned on the sill beside her. 'There's room to breathe—heaps of room—on those big green hills. And that sea-wind's worth breathing. London was interesting, but it was stuffy, Tib! Think of those noisy, crowded streets!'

'Oh, I loved them! But aren't the hills funny here? No rocks or stones; no lumpy bits or crags; no glens or waterfalls, as we had at home. D'you suppose they've been smoothed over with the garden roller?'

'If they have, it hasn't made them very flat.'

'No, not flat, but smooth, like a lawn, or the sides of a ball. I'd love to roll down them.'

'They are smooth,' Lib agreed. 'What shall we do after tea?'

'I know what I'm going to do!' Tib spoke with conviction.

'What?' Libby waited anxiously. She too had one overwhelming desire, but scarcely dared to hope Tib's would be the same. She was quite prepared to put her own wish aside and do what Tibby wanted, but the best thing of all would be if they could both want to do the same thing. So she waited with a touch of dread to hear what Tib would say. Would she demand that they should explore the garden? That would be only natural, after all. Well, if she did, the garden it should be!

'I'm going to climb that big green hill, and see what I can see from the top!' Tibby announced.

Libby's face cleared, and she laughed in great relief; her arm crept round her sister's waist as she said, 'That's what I want to do too, more than anything. We'll go at once after tea. We can get to the top in five minutes; it's not like our hills at home. Then we'll come down again and look at the garden, shall we?'

'Oh yes, after! I want to see it too. But we'll climb the hill first. I couldn't stand having a wee hill like that shutting me in, unless I knew what's on the other side.'

'I expect we'll see the sea from the top. The wind smells salty. But you've had hills shutting you in all your life, Tib—hills that you couldn't climb, at least not in five minutes.'

'Rather not! That's why. I can climb this little, round, green thing, and so I've got to. But after that I shall want to see the garden before I explore any more.'

'I feel just the same,' Lib said happily, and went down to tea in much relief of mind. Her charm had worked. Here in the country they would do the same things, and like the same things, as they always had done. They went down to tea much pleased with their first glimpse of their new home; very full of talk of all they had seen so far, of the schoolgirls in the train, and of the journey; and eager to be off and out as soon as they had helped their mother in the first necessary unpacking.

CHAPTER V.
LIBBY, TIBBY, AND RIBBY.

'I think we shall see the sea from the top,' Lib said again, as they crossed the white chalky track, and began to climb the green down. 'It smells like it.'

'I say, just look!' Tib dropped on her knees and began to gather cowslips with both hands —tiny short-stalked cowslips, to be sure, like everything growing on the Downs, but cowslips of richest yellow, scattered everywhere on the springy turf.

'I love them!' and Libby knelt in rapturous delight also. 'I didn't think anything grew here but grass.'

'Here's something else—heather? It can't possibly be heather in May! But it looks like it.'

It was only milkwort, however, and they soon grew used to seeing the turf under their feet coloured purple or lavender or deepest blue with its starry sprays. 'Down-heather' was Tib's name for it, but she owned that only applied when it was purple. The deep gentian blue was Libby's favourite, and she was rarely without a few sprigs of it among the cowslips always in her button-hole or belt. The close-growing nature of all these Down plants, their 'small lowness,' as Tibby said, surprised them at first, till they realised what the force of the wind must be, especially in winter, and how nothing big could flourish on these hills except stunted gorse or hawthorn. The trees of the district were mostly sycamores and chestnuts, and were magnificent in their age and growth, but they were all in the hollows, and so were most of the fields and farms.

'Come on and see the sea!' said Tib at last, and they began to run up the slope, but soon had to take a slower pace. The hill was not so little as it had looked from their window.

It was not the sea which faced them when at last they reached the crest they had seen from below, but only another green slope, and experience soon taught them that there was almost invariably another hill beyond when they thought they had reached the top. They toiled on in laughing disgust, and at last were rewarded with a wide view.

But not of the sea! They could see it, indeed, but a stretch of rolling downs lay between them and the cliffs; and here, perched on the highest point, and directly in their way as they gazed seawards, stood the great school building their mother had pointed out. They sank down on the turf to rest, and gazed at the school with unfriendly, critical eyes.

'Great, bare, ugly barn!' said Tib. 'Glad I don't live there!'

'We may have to,' Lib reminded her. 'It's where mother wants us to go, isn't it?'

'*I* don't want to go!'

'I used to think so too.' Lib lay at full length on the turf and spoke thoughtfully, her eyes on the school. 'I'm not so sure now, after seeing those girls to-day. Suppose the girls over yonder are like those in the train! Don't you think it might be rather jolly to be friends with them?'

'Oh, if it was those girls I wouldn't mind so much!' Tib conceded. 'I'd like to be chums with that Sammy. And you liked Rowena. But 'tisn't them; it's other girls we don't know.'

'Yes; but they might be nice too. Not quite so nice, perhaps, but still they might be interesting. And it's not only the girls themselves! It's the whole thing, the—the life!—the jokes—all that's going on! While they were talking about last summer's camp, and this summer's camp—I hope they'll get the place they want—and all the things we didn't understand, all the names and everything, I just felt I wanted to be *in* it all, and understand it all, and join in everything! I don't know how to say what I mean, but I felt a kind of outsider. Didn't you feel it too, Tibby?'

‘Course I did. I’d like to do all those things Sammy does. I want to know all about it.’

‘I don’t suppose we can, unless we get a chance to make friends with them somehow. But our school would have interesting things going on, too. A big place like that must have heaps for the girls to do. It wouldn’t be dull, Tib!’

‘I suppose you mean it’s dull, just the two of us being alone together?’

‘It never has been yet,’ Lib said simply, and her tone carried more conviction than an indignant protest. ‘And it isn’t just now, with all this new place to explore. Let’s go down and see the garden now. But I believe, if the girls were nice, school could be even more interesting than home. I would love to feel I was in the thick of things, with heaps of important things going on, and lots to do and think about.’

‘Oh, well, so would I, of course! But we aren’t to go before the autumn, anyway. Perhaps by then we’ll have seen some of the girls, and that may make us want to go. I’m going to roll!’ and Tib threw herself down on the slope and proceeded to do so, rolling over and over till she almost landed in the chalky ruts of the cart-track.

Lib laughed and followed suit. ‘It’s a good thing we’ve got on caps, not hats!’ she called. Then she caught at a tussock of wiry grass, and stopped herself with difficulty. ‘Tib!’ she shrieked, sitting up very suddenly. ‘Tibby! Tibby! Stop!’

But Tibby could not stop. She was on a steeper slope, and rolling with greater speed. Over and over she went, and then, as Libby had foreseen, she crashed into the front-wheel of a cyclist riding along the turf at the side of the road.

The cycle came down with a clatter, and another rider behind only just managed to swerve aside in time to avoid adding his machine to the smash-up. He sprang from his seat, the dismounted rider picked himself up wrathfully, and both addressed themselves very pointedly to Tibby, who sat rubbing her knees and elbows resentfully.

‘What d’you mean by playing that silly trick? You might have smashed my bike, you stupid kid!’

‘Hurt yourself, silly? Serves you jolly well right if you have!’

They were a couple of schoolboys, of twelve and fifteen years. As soon as they were satisfied that neither the girl nor the cycle was really injured, their indignation broke out again. Libby, having scrambled to her feet, came racing down the hill, and hurled herself into the midst of their storm of protest.

‘Tibby! Tibby! Are you hurt?’

‘Yes, bumped all over! Why weren’t they riding in the road, daft creatures? Libby, don’t you think it was their fault for riding on the grass?’

‘It was just as much them as you, anyway’——

‘I say!’ the elder boy broke in, with laughing eyes. ‘What name did you call her?’

‘Libby,’ said Tib.

‘Tibby,’ said Lib.

‘No—really?’ His brown eyes danced more than ever. ‘Then I think we must be relations. I’m Ribby.’

His brother laughed. ‘Oh yes, it’s true!’ he said, as the girls stared doubtfully. ‘He’s John Ribble Stanley, generally known as Ribs or Ribby. Was it Tibby or Libby that smashed into Ribby?’

They all laughed at that; and Ribby picked up his cycle and leaned it against a bank. ‘It was Tibby,’ he said. ‘Isn’t it rummy, though? Are you the new kids at Woody Dean? We heard you were coming to-day. But we didn’t quite expect you to—well, kick up such a shindy so soon!’

‘Why were you riding on the grass?’ Tib demanded, her tone still injured.

‘Always do. Everybody does. You will yourself as soon as you’ve unpacked your bike. The turf’s topping. I say, you aren’t really hurt, are you?’

Tib was still rubbing her knees suggestively. ‘Frightfully!’ she said gloomily. Then she surrendered, and laughed. ‘Don’t worry! I’m not really. I only thought you ought to think I was!’

Ribby laughed. ‘I thought you were only pulling my leg’——

‘I wasn’t! I never would!’

The boys laughed again.

Tibby demanded of the younger of the two, ‘What’s your name?’

‘Jim,’ he said promptly.

‘Perks,’ said his brother swiftly. ‘Perks or Perky, if *you* please!’

‘Ribs or Ribby, and Perks or Perky!’ Tib repeated.—‘Yours isn’t pretty!’ to Jim. ‘What’s your real name?’

‘Percival James. But I couldn’t help it, you know. I wasn’t asked if I’d like it.’

‘He thinks even Perks is better than Percy,’ Ribby explained. ‘How d’you like Woody Dean?’

‘We’ve not seen much of it yet. We were going to explore the garden when you stopped us.’

‘*I* stopped you! I like that! Seems to me you did the stopping yourself. I should have thought you’d explore the garden first of all?’

‘No,’ said Lib, sitting on the turf and nursing her knees as she gazed up at them. ‘We couldn’t. We had to climb this hill first. Something made us. We thought we’d see the sea from the top.’

‘And we found that horrid old school stuck right in the way!’ Tibby said resentfully.

Perks laughed. But Ribby said seriously, ‘It is a blot on the face of the earth, isn’t it? Are they going to send you there?’

‘Later on, perhaps.’

He nodded. ‘It’s a rummy school. My sisters go there. I could give you some points about it, if you like.’

‘Go on, do!’ begged Tib eagerly.

‘But we won’t promise to believe it all,’ Lib said unexpectedly. She had been watching his face, and had caught the momentary glance which flashed from him to Perks.

Ribby laughed easily. ‘Think we’re going to pull your legs this time?’

‘You rude thing!’ began Tibby. Then light dawned on her. ‘Oh, is that what you mean?’ and she began to laugh.

‘It is a jolly rummy school.’ Ribby bent to feel his tires. ‘If you’re a good little girl they give you beads.’

‘Beads?’ echoed Tib incredulously.

Libby scanned his face gravely. ‘It sounds babyish,’ said she.

Perky Jim chuckled. ‘Awfully kiddy! But the poor infants are just wild to get their beads. You should see my sister with hers!’

The boys looked at one another with dancing eyes.

Libby gazed at them gravely. ‘What do they do with the beads?’

‘Wear them, of course—whole strings of them. Sometimes, if you’re extra specially good, or brilliant, you get—just think of it!—a *big* bead! There!’

‘It does sound silly. I don’t think I want to go,’ said Tibby.

‘I say, Ribs, old chap, wouldn’t they hate you if they could hear you?’ laughed the younger boy.

Ribby laughed too. ‘Well, I’ve heard enough about those old beads these hols.’

‘I’d like to know more about it,’ Libby said cautiously. ‘Are the beads pretty ones?’

‘Oh, not bad! And sometimes, instead of prizes or certificates, they get little, round, white things, the size of pennies, to stitch on to their frocks.’

Tibby’s eyes grew round. ‘How awfully daft! Do they want them? I shouldn’t think they’d care a scrap about them!’

‘They’re crazy to get them. My sister’s wild to get seven, because then she’ll be allowed to twist a bit of white cord round her shoulder.’

‘You make it all sound very silly,’ said Lib. ‘But I’d like to ask your sisters about it first.’

‘It’s a fact,’ Ribby protested. ‘I haven’t told you a thing that isn’t true.’

‘What do they do with the white penny things?’ demanded Tibby.

‘Wear ’em on their sleeves. They’re awfully proud of them.’

Libby leaned forward suddenly, and asked a question more full of meaning than she knew: ‘Like the Scouts? We’ve seen them in Glasgow. They wear round things on their sleeves.’

‘I say, Ribs, old chap, we sha’n’t get home to-night at this rate!’ Perks protested.

‘We’d better get along,’ Ribby agreed, wheeling his cycle out on to the cart-track. ‘I guess we’d better take the road this time, Perks, case there’s any more kids coming somersaulting down the hills.’

‘Right-o! I’m ready.’

‘We’re sure to see you again soon,’ Ribby called back in farewell. ‘Our place is opposite the church. I guess you’ll be about the village a good deal!’

They rode off down the white track, and the girls looked at one another.

‘What a queer kind of school!’ said Tibby. ‘Do you think it was all true, Libby? Or was he just—what did he call it?—pulling our legs?’

‘No; I think it was all true,’ Lib said thoughtfully. ‘But perhaps it isn’t as silly as it sounds. He was trying to make it sound daft, you know. The other boy, Jim’——

‘Perks!’ laughed Tibby.

‘He said the girls would hate to have them talk that way. I think perhaps it all means something, and the boys were just making fun of it all. I wouldn’t believe anything Ribby said while his eyes were laughing like that!’

Tib laughed and sprang to her feet. ‘We’ll ask them more about it next time we see them. Now let’s go and see our own garden!’

The garden of Woody Dean was sheltered by big trees, and was quiet and shut in, but not large. That did not matter much, however, since the girls already felt they had all the Downs to wander upon. There was a little lawn, just too small for tennis, with a rose-walk down one side, and fine standard roses at the other. There was a small vegetable-garden; and a stream which ran through the valley passed down one side of the lawn, overhung with ferns, and looked tempting for paddling.

Beyond the garden were two or three small fields, in which the grass was being allowed to grow for hay. Mr Mackenzie had rented the whole property, and intended to sell the hay in June. But more fascinating to the girls than the fields, or even the garden, was the little wood of sycamore-trees which stretched up the valley above the house on both sides of the stream. The trees were very large and very old, hung with great drooping tassels of pale green, just opening into flower; beneath were shady glades, grassy and moss-grown, with primroses and hyacinths—a perfect playground, with the laughing water of the stream for companion.

And beyond the wood, but before the Downs began, was a great irregular ring of big chestnut-trees, set rather wide apart, enclosing a grassy space dotted with buttercups and pink sainfoin and white campion, in which Lib recognised her white stars of the cornfields.

‘I thought it must be cotton-grass. It’s so very white,’ she said.

‘Don’t you think perhaps this was made on purpose to play circus in?’ Tib stood in the middle of the round field and looked about her.

‘It’s like a fairy ring,’ said Lib.

Between the chestnuts were bushes of hawthorn, growing to their full size in this sheltered spot, not stunted like those up on the Downs. They were white with blossom, and the chestnuts were weighted with creamy spires, so the ring of white around the glade was complete, and the air was heavy with mingled scents.

‘I like this and the wood even better than the garden,’ Libby said, with conviction. ‘We don’t need a big garden with these and the Downs just outside.’

And they went to bed that night very well satisfied with what they had seen, so far, of their new surroundings.

CHAPTER VI.
ROBINS AND BROWNIES.

If the girls had been of one mind as to how they must spend their first evening, they were equally agreed about the next morning. Before breakfast—there was always a before-breakfast period to their day—they went again through the garden, the Sycamore Wood, and the Chestnut Ring, out on to the open Downs among the thyme and cowslips, and wandering along the brow of the hill, looked across at the school on their left hand and the sea beyond, and presently found themselves gazing down at the village. From this side it looked as long and narrow, as 'squashed between the hills,' as Tibby said, as from the road on the previous afternoon.

They tried to guess which was the home of Ribby and Perks, but could not identify it from that height, so they hurried home with unusually big appetites, for the Down air was doing its work already, and as soon as breakfast was over were eager to set out for the village. Their mother gave them a few small commissions, and their father advised shady hats instead of caps.

'You'll find it hot down there. The hills will keep out all the wind,' he said.

They took his advice, and regretted it, for as they passed the church and round pond, and entered the straight main street, a gale of wind met them, blowing up through the gap in the cliffs, right off the sea. They clung to their hats and staggered on in the teeth of it.

'What did father mean? Was he trying to be funny?' cried Tib. 'Was he—was he pulling our legs?'

'No, I don't think he knew. It was hot at Woody Dean, but that must have been because of that big hill between us and the sea,' Libby panted. 'It was keeping off our wind.' And they soon learned that the winds of this particular village needed learning before one could venture to prophesy concerning them.

They discovered one butcher's shop, tucked away in a corner near the church, one good grocer's, and one little house which sold fruit and flowers and vegetables. There was a 'fancy store,' where one bought picture post-cards and stationery, spades and buckets, dolls and china ornaments, and where library books could be borrowed for twopence a book. There was one draper's shop, and one baker's, a good chemist's, and a fine post-office. But there was no choice of shops, no two of anything, so they had no difficulty in deciding where to make their purchases. But the shopping took some time, for everybody seemed to be wanting groceries, meat, and fruit at the same moment, and one small counter could not serve them all. There was no choice but much waiting, and at first Libby and Tib wandered up and down the street, waiting until there should be more room inside. But experience soon taught them that this was useless; there never seemed to be more room; the shops were always full, for every house and cottage which let rooms was busy with visitors for the season. So they resigned themselves to patient waiting in the stuffy atmosphere within, and were amused to meet the same mothers and children, maids and cottagers, at shop after shop.

Only in the post-office did there seem to be plenty of room. They had only to wait while one customer who had entered just in front of them was served. She was a dark-eyed girl of about twenty-three, tall and slim, wearing a knitted cap on her dark hair, and a coat to match; she wheeled her cycle into the shop, and went to the counter to make several purchases. The old postmaster evidently knew her well, and Libby and Tib, waiting for stamps, could not help hearing his greeting.

'Eh, Miss Helen! So you and the Brownies are back again?'

‘Back again,’ Miss Helen smiled. ‘You’ll have another three months of us now, I hope. But the girls haven’t been in the village yet, surely?’

‘Nay; but we saw them driving through. I’m always right glad to see your Brownies back; there’s some stir in the village when they come.’

Miss Helen laughed. ‘They must make a difference. But you have plenty of visitors this summer?’

‘Oh, ay! The village is full.’

Then an assistant came forward, and Libby stopped staring and remembered her errand with difficulty.

Tib was tugging at her arm. Libby gathered up her change and stamps and hurried out, and the dark-haired girl looked after them with interest.

‘Where are they stopping?’ she asked the old man.

But he had not seen the girls before, so could not tell her. In a few days the whole village knew them as the new tenants of Woody Dean, but it was too early for that yet.

Out in the street Tibby turned to her sister with eyes blazing with excitement. ‘Did you hear? Did you understand? Oh, come down by the sea and talk! We can’t talk here!’

They ran down the street to the gap where the valley broke through the white cliff wall, and a long stone slip for boats ran out across the shingle. The wind was tearing up from the beach, strong and salt, and made conversation impossible; but Tib dropped in a corner in the lee of a boat drawn high on the slip, and there they could talk in comfort.

‘Did you hear? He called her “Miss Helen”! And those girls in the train talked about Miss Helen!’

‘Yes, Rowena and Rose and Sybil. Then do you think’ — — Lib began doubtfully.

‘That they come from our school! I say, won’t it be awfully fine if it’s true? We’re sure to meet some of them, and we half know them already, so we’ll be able to speak to them and find out what they meant by all they said in the train, and what Ribby and Perks meant, and everything!’

‘Mother will know,’ Libby said, with conviction.

‘Perhaps she knew all the time, and didn’t tell us. Let’s go home quick and ask her!’

‘I never thought they could belong to *this* school!’ Tib laughed in delight, as they set off up the street again. ‘She said there were heaps of schools about. It’s too awfully good luck if they come from ours!’

‘The old man said he’d seen them driving through the village. We know they drove away from the station,’ Libby argued. ‘But why did he call them “Brownies”?’

‘Come on home and ask mother. We’ll make her tell us now.’

‘We were to get some picture post-cards of the village. I saw them in this wee shop.’ And they turned into the ‘fancy store.’

Then a quick look of delight flashed from one to the other, for Miss Helen was here before them, talking over the counter with the woman in charge. She was apparently being told again how glad the villagers were to see her back.

‘We always miss you all that badly,’ the old lady was saying. ‘The place isn’t like itself at all without the Robins running in for cards and chocolates.’

‘Some of them eat too many chocolates,’ Miss Helen remarked. ‘I’ve been urging them to go without, but they won’t see it. And how is your daughter after her holiday?’

‘Oh, she’s that much better you’d hardly know her.—Edith!’ she called, and a girl came out to greet Miss Helen warmly and be congratulated on her improved appearance. She came to serve Libby and Tib; and as they lingered over their choice of cards, hoping to hear more, Miss Helen glanced at them curiously again, for girls of any kind attracted her, and these girls were unusually pretty.

‘Have you seen the church yet?’ she asked pleasantly, as they stood with heads close together looking at a picture of a stained-glass window.

Libby looked up with a start, flushing in shy self-consciousness at the thought that Miss Helen did not know they had been talking about her. ‘No, not yet,’ her answer came shyly. ‘We only came last night. Are these windows in it? It must be lovely.’

‘Yes, it’s beautiful. You must see it. Are you stopping long?’

‘Two or three years,’ Lib said simply. ‘It depends on father’s cough.’

Miss Helen stared, then laughed out. ‘Oh, I beg your pardon!’ she said quickly, as Libby coloured again. ‘But I expected you to say “two or three weeks,” or a month at longest. I was quite taken by surprise. I didn’t understand you were going to live here. Oh, then, I’m sure we shall often see one another.’

‘We live at Woody Dean, so I expect we shall,’ said Tib. ‘It’s very near the school, isn’t it?’

Surprise, and something very like pleasure—but that seemed impossible—had flashed into Miss Helen’s dark eyes at mention of Woody Dean. It was gone in a moment, however, and she said curiously, ‘Now, how did you know I came from the school? I don’t look particularly like a schoolmistress, do I? I’m not one of the mistresses, though I live there, you know. Miss Robinson, the head, is my sister. What made you connect me with the school? Or did somebody tell you who I was?’

The girls looked at one another. Libby hesitated; after all, they were not sure. There might possibly be two Miss Helens.

But Tib had no doubts, and her answer came in a burst of confidence. ‘It was the girls in the train yesterday afternoon. Seven of them were in our carriage, and they talked all the way. They spoke about “Miss Helen,” and the post-office man called you that, and we thought you must be the same one.’

‘We couldn’t help hearing,’ Libby added.

Miss Helen laughed. ‘I’m quite sure you couldn’t. If seven of our Robins travelled with you, I expect you heard a good deal. Did they know you were coming to Woody Dean?’

‘Oh no! We didn’t speak about us at all, except that Rowena asked if those were really our names,’ Tib explained ingenuously.

Libby’s eyes met Miss Helen’s questioning dark ones. ‘I’m Libby. She’s Tibby. Rowena said it was too good to be true.’

Miss Helen laughed again. ‘I almost think it is. You are Elizabeth, I suppose? And Tibby?’

‘Tib’s Isobel.’

‘And you are both as true Scots in face and talk as you are in name. But I must get on. I’m glad to know you, Libby and Tibby, and I’m sure we shall meet again often. I suppose’—and she looked at Tib—‘Sammy was there too? She isn’t one of my own girls, as Rowena is, but we all know Samanthy. She must be about your age.’

‘She was there. She talked to Dorothy and Cicely and Phyllis.’

‘Yes, she would. She’d be quite happy if she had those three. And had Rowena no one to talk to?’

‘There was a girl called Rose, and her sister Sybil,’ Lib said shyly. ‘But they all called one another funny names. The other four didn’t.’

‘Bad girls! Those names are supposed to be kept private. They’re certainly not for use in railway trains.’

‘I think they were all so awfully glad to see one another after the holidays, so they didn’t think,’ Libby ventured.

‘Yes, I expect they were all too much excited to think. Well, good-bye! I hope we shall meet again soon.’

‘Oh, please!’ broke from Tib, as Miss Helen went towards the door. ‘Why do you call the girls Robins and Brownies? You do mean the girls, don’t you?’

‘See if you can find out for yourselves. It won’t take you long;’ and Miss Helen mounted her cycle and rode away.

The girls looked at one another, flushed and frankly pleased with the meeting.

‘I like her,’ said cautious Libby. ‘She’s awfully kind.’

‘She’s awfully jolly! Let’s go home and tell mother! What do you think about Robins and Brownies?’ Tibby asked, as they hurried up the street, the wind whirling their hair about their faces and blowing their skirts and hats.

‘If the head-mistress is Miss Robinson, that might be one reason. “Miss Robinson’s Robins,” you know.’

‘Ye-es! I wonder if that’s the whole of it. And what about Brownies?’

‘I don’t know. She said we’d find out. Shall we go into the church and see the windows?’ and Lib cast a longing look at the old lich-gate.

But Tibby would not hear of it. ‘I want to tell mother all about Miss Helen.’

So Libby yielded, and they turned into the Woody Dean lane, and at once found themselves sheltered from the gale.

‘Oh, I say! Isn’t it hot?’ groaned Tibby.

‘We’ll have to go up on the Downs if we want to get cool. Here comes mother!—to look for us, I expect. She won’t guess how crowded the shops were.’

‘She won’t know about the visitors.—Mother! Mother! Those girls in the train—Rowena and Sammy and Rose and the rest—did you know they came from our school?’

‘*Our* school!’ Mrs Mackenzie laughed. ‘Since when has it been your school? This is surely a very sudden adoption. I thought it was *my* old school!’

‘Oh, well, I mean this school in our village! Did you know, mother?’

‘Of course I knew. I knew their school colours, on their hats, you know—deep brown, with a touch of crimson. It hasn’t been changed since my day.’

‘Then why didn’t you tell us?’

‘And do you know Miss Robinson, mother?’

‘To be sure; but she was not head-mistress in my time, but chief English mistress. I thought you would soon find out for yourself, Tibby. Now answer a question for me! I’m sure it’s my turn! How have you found out? Have you been talking to any of the girls? Or to those boys again? Surely the girls would be in school at this time!’

‘No, it was Miss Helen; they talked about her yesterday. She was in the post-card shop. We heard her name, and wondered if she could be their Miss Helen; and then she spoke to us, and asked how long we were stopping.’

‘I said two or three years,’ said Libby, ‘and it made her laugh. I didn’t think it was funny, but she seemed to.’

Mrs Mackenzie laughed also. ‘And who is she? A mistress, I suppose?’

‘No; she’s Miss Robinson’s sister, and she lives at the school,’ Libby explained. ‘We told her we came from Woody Dean, and she said she was glad she’d met us. She was awfully nice, mother. And—mother! She said something like this—that we were as true Scots in our talk and—and’——

‘Face,’ said Tib promptly. ‘I wondered what she meant. People haven’t all got the same kind of faces in Scotland!’

‘And face as we were in name,’ Libby finished.

‘Now, mother!’

‘That’s your hair and freckles, my dear children! Miss Helen seems to have said a good deal in a short time. Any more?’

‘Oh yes, a lot, but chiefly about the girls in the train. Mother, do you know why she sometimes calls them Robins? Is it because of Miss Robinson? The shop-people do it too.’

‘And sometimes Brownies,’ Tib added. ‘Did they call you a Brownie when you were at school?’

‘Not that I ever heard. You’ll find out the reason in time, no doubt.’

‘Yes, she said we would.’

‘And did you see the house your boy friends come from?’

The girls looked at one another. ‘We forgot all about Ribby and Perks! Let’s go back and look for it now!’

‘No, no! I want those groceries! Cook is waiting for them. I wouldn’t have believed you could take so long to do a few simple errands!’

‘Oh, but you didn’t see the shops!’ said Tibby. ‘Just you wait till you’ve done the shopping yourself, mother dear! Nobody’s in any hurry here. They’re all having their holidays, and any time in the morning will do. And there are hundreds of them!’

‘Hundreds of what, my dear Tib?’

‘Shoppers—mothers and babies and children and all kinds of people. And only one shop of each kind for them all. And all wanting the same things!’

‘Then I suppose I must forgive you. But we must hurry home now.’

‘Oh, well, I suppose we’ll be in the village again sometime,’ Libby said philosophically.

‘It’s just possible you will,’ Mrs Mackenzie said gravely.

CHAPTER VII.
THE BIRCH TREE AND THE RAINBOW IN TROUBLE.

'The Brownies!' cried Libby, as they reached the top of the hill and looked across at the school.

There had been no more chance to wander about the village that morning. Mr Mackenzie, a keen gardener, had been round the garden while they were shopping, and had decided that he must set to work at once, and that the girls must help. The garden had been put in order to a certain extent before their arrival, but the house had stood empty all the previous summer, with the natural results. The beds were full of weeds, and the lawn of daisies and dandelions, plantains and buttercups. It was useless to be content with cutting off the heads of these, and equally useless to wait for outside help. Labour was very scarce, and it would be impossible to get a gardener for such work as this. They might find one in the village, but there would be more important work for him to do. The weeds in beds and path, the lawn and its unclipped edges, were work any one could do, and there was no time to lose. He set to work at once, while Mrs Mackenzie was still getting her house into order, and the girls were pressed into service also.

They were not fond of gardening—at least, not of weeding and digging up daisy-roots, though Tib had no objection to using the lawn-mower for a few minutes at a time. But they could not see their father working and refuse to help, so they all spent a busy and tiring morning, and after dinner were content to take books and climb high enough up the great south down to feel the wind from the sea.

It was as they reached the top that Libby cried, 'The Brownies!' and flung out a triumphant pointing finger towards the green hill near the school. It was covered with brown dots, which moved, and ran, and formed in groups, and scattered again; and borne on the sea-wind, which had dropped to a light breeze, came the sound of girls' voices, shouts and laughter.

'They must all be dressed alike,' Tibby marvelled. 'I wouldn't like that; would you? I wonder if they're told they must wear brown dresses! It must look like workhouse children!'

'Or soldiers—a uniform, you know. I'd like to see them close and see if they're all made alike, or just all the same colour.' Lib lay on the turf and gazed across at the girls. 'There are a lot of them!'

'They do make a row!'

'They all had brown round their hats. Mother said it was their school colour,' Lib said thoughtfully.

'You saw Sammy's hat that she'd broken the brim of?'

Tib laughed. 'Yes, I saw it. But they weren't dressed in brown then! Most of them had blue costumes.'

'Perhaps these are only to wear in school. I'd like to see them close!'

The wish was gratified before long. As she and Tibby watched, they saw a number of the girls wander along the hill towards the village and disappear. With one accord the sisters looked at one another, forgetting they had been tired.

'They've gone to buy sweets and things, as that woman said. Let's go and buy sweets too! Then we'll meet them!' Lib's eyes sparkled.

'Perhaps we'll see Sammy, or some of the other train girls!' Tib sprang up eagerly.

They wandered hopefully down the village street, and met girls in plenty, but no Sammy, Rowena, or Rose. They were always in twos and threes. Libby and Tib learned later that they were allowed to go into the village freely at certain times, on condition that no girl went alone.

But though Libby and Tib met no girls they knew, the groups they did meet satisfied their curiosity as to the school 'uniform.' The girls, almost without exception, wore gym. tunics of smooth brown cloth, with a small crimson badge embroidered on the breast, and loose white sleeves and yoke. With brown girdles, and brown shoes and stockings, and the big shady hats trimmed with brown and crimson scarves, they looked very neat, and the nickname given them by the villagers seemed very appropriate.

'But why should they be called Robins?' said Tib. 'Shall I ask them?' and she nodded towards two Brownies gazing in at a cottage window.

'No, don't; they'd stare so. Perhaps it's only because of Miss Robinson. I didn't know that was a shop. Was it there this morning?'

'Yes; but it wasn't a shop then,' Tib laughed. 'They've stuck some buns and bottles of sweets in the window, instead of the ferns and geraniums.'

'There seem more shops than there were this morning!' Libby argued; and they went up and down the village counting the tea-shops and refreshment-rooms which had disclosed themselves as such since the early morning—quite unconscious that the schoolgirls had noticed them, and were watching them in their turn.

'If ever I want to open a tea-shop, I won't do it here!' Lib said decidedly. 'Every single house in the place seems to want you to go in and have tea!'

'I wonder if they're ever all full?' Tibby laughed.

But that question was answered on the following Saturday and Sunday afternoons, when every available tea-table was occupied by day-visitors from the neighbouring town, and many were left to walk thirstily up and down while waiting for their turn. On these days the streets and cliffs were busy with motor-cars, wagonettes, taxis, carriages, traps, and cycles, and the girls from the big school were never seen in the village. Lib and Tib soon learned to avoid it also, and to give the cliffs and beach a wide berth, and keep chiefly to their own garden or the inland Downs.

Presently they discovered that the Brownies had disappeared from the village street, and this and their own feelings suggested that it must be nearly tea-time. So they turned homewards, and as they passed the old church had no difficulty in guessing which was the home of Ribby and Perks—a big, gray house, almost buried in old elm-trees, with high, ivy-covered walls enclosing the garden. It looked interesting, but they could not see much, so they turned homewards up the lane to Woody Dean.

By tea-time the wind had dropped so completely that even in the village street there was only a slight breeze, and the Woody Dean valley was very hot. To their great delight, the girls found tea spread under the big sycamore-trees on the lawn.

'This is just like home!' Lib sighed enjoyably; 'only there we'd be having it beside the loch, and watching the afternoon steamers go out.'

'And choke us with their smoke!' Tibby added. 'There's only one place that would be nicer than this for tea, mother dear, and that's the Sycamore Wood, up by the stream. There are the dearest little corners for picnics. Some day we'll have supper out in the Chestnut Ring, where the hawthorn-bushes are!'

Up on the hill, in the playing-field behind the big school, the Brownies were joyfully preparing tea outside also. Their dining-room windows looked to the back of the house, away from the sea, and every fine afternoon and evening, if a sufficient number of them cared to take the trouble, they were allowed to carry out long trestle tables and set them up outside for tea. The garden was very bare, as was inevitable up on the Downs, and there was no shade at midday; but by five o'clock the great house cast a fair amount of shadow, and in this, sheltered from the sea-wind, it was possible to enjoy a meal. At the beginning of the term these outdoor meals were very popular, and there was no lack of helpers to lay the cloth and carry out the

dishes which the maids brought as far as the window-sills; but as the weeks passed the enjoyment grew stale, and sometimes it was found too much trouble to have outdoor tea. In hot weather a picnic supper was always the rule, however, and when the sun was low, and the house and flagstaff cast long shadows across the playing-field, groups of girls laden with bread and butter, fruit and milk, would gather in every corner and on the grass banks, and enjoy the cool sea-air as they rested and chatted. For supper, they sat where and how they liked; but tea was always served at long tables, and so needed more elaborate preparation.

'I say, Samanthy!' cried a tall girl, placing the trestles in position. 'Didn't I hear you say something about two red-haired girls in the train yesterday?'

Sammy and Dorothy were staggering under one end of a long table, Cicely and Phyllis at the other. They placed it in position on the trestles; then all turned eagerly.

'Yes, they were in our carriage. Weena spoke to them. Why, Vera?'

'I think we saw them in the village just now. They had red hair, anyway, and were about your size.'

'The little one had curls,' said Dorothy.

'And the big one's hair was as long as Rowena's—past her waist,' Phyllis added.

'Then it was them—they were it—sure enough.'

'But how weird that they should come here! I wonder where they're stopping.'

Rowena came out to lay the cloth. 'Come on, you slackers, or the tea will be made before the cups are out. Has any one seen Grey Edward? Shall I bring out a saucer for him?'

'No, you needn't. I saw him setting out by the front-gate—for the village, or London, or the North Pole. He won't come back till to-morrow.—Weena, those reddy girls in the train are here, in the village!'

'Lib and Tib?' Rowena paused in surprise. 'How odd! Pity we talked so much! They couldn't help hearing every word. There's Miss Helen! I know she'll say we shouldn't have talked about school business in the train. I'd better confess at once.—I say, Uda! Guardian dear!'

'I'm coming to take your urn this afternoon.' Miss Helen came up to the table. 'There's an honour for you! But where are the cups and saucers?'

'Oh, then I'll wait till we've started! I wanted to tell you something;' and Rowena hurried away for a trayload of dishes.

Rose, Sybil, and Rowena were among those at Miss Helen's table, but Samanthy and her friends, and Vera, were all at the far end. When the first cups had been poured out, Rowena began eagerly, 'Oh, Miss Helen, I want to tell you something we did yesterday! I'm afraid you won't quite like it.'

Miss Helen's dark eyes laughed at her. 'Is it about Libby and Tibby?'

'Oh! How did you know? Vera says they're here in the village.'

'I met them this morning. They were buying post-cards, and we had a chat. I found they knew quite a lot about us. Tanpa—Nyoda—you ought to know better than to use your ceremonial names in railway carriages!'

'Yes, I know,' Rowena said penitently. 'But we never thought they'd be coming here. How could we? It didn't seem to matter.'

'Did you think about it at all?' Miss Helen asked, in mock severity.

'No, of course we didn't. We were all off our heads, and we just talked on and on like idiots,' said Rose. 'We quite forgot those girls sitting in the corner with big staring eyes. Tanpa said they had yellow eyes!!

'Oh, I didn't, Rainbow! They're a beautiful golden-brown, as big and soft as velvet. But I really never dreamt of their coming here, Miss Helen. Are they stopping long?'

'Libby says it may be two or three years,' Miss Helen laughed.

'*Years?*'

'Shall I tell you all about them?'

'Oh, do, please! Did they tell you?'

'They told me a little, and I've found out the rest since. They are the new people at Woody Dean;' and Miss Helen watched the effect of her news with laughing eyes.

'Woody Dean!' The girls looked at one another, deepest meaning in their faces.

'Then we *shall* see them again! There's no doubt of that!' The Rainbow laughed.

'If they'll have us there to camp! Oh, Miss Helen, do you suppose they will? We've been wondering all the holidays what the new people at Woody Dean would be like, for all our camping plans just depend on them,' a dark-faced girl sitting beside Rowena spoke eagerly.

'I can't say anything about that yet, Yallani. My sister will find out presently; but if they only came yesterday, we must give them time to settle down before we trouble them.'

'Who could imagine that the new girls from Woody Dean would travel down in our carriage?' Rowena said mournfully. 'We talked heaps about the camp, and whether the new people would have us, and—and I'm afraid Sammy said if they were pigs they might not!'

'But would they know you were talking about them?' asked a girl next to Yallani. 'Did you mention Woody Dean?'

'I don't think so; but when they see us again they'll guess, Killooleet.—I say, Guardian, I wish we hadn't talked quite so much!'

'So do I, Tanpa. I hope you haven't prejudiced them against us. If we aren't allowed to camp at Woody Dean this summer you'll only have yourselves to blame.'

'I'm awfully sorry, but we never thought.' Rowena was quite crestfallen.

'Shall I tell you what I know about them? My sister knows Mrs Mackenzie, their mother, very well. She was a girl at this school twenty years ago, but her home has been in Scotland ever since. Now they have come to live here because her husband is in poor health; she is anxious that the girls shall come to us, so she looked for a house near, and found Woody Dean. I find that my sister has heard from her during the holidays, but, as you know, I have been away in the north, and only returned yesterday, shortly before you did. It is probable that Libby and Tibby will come here, perhaps in the autumn; but they are shy, and have never lived away from home before, so their mother will give them some time to grow used to the idea before sending them to us.'

'It's an awful idea, to come to live with us!' another tall girl laughed. 'I don't wonder it needs some getting used to, Uda!'

'If you had never lived away from home, you might feel the same, Dawn. So, if you meet them and can make friends, you will make it easier for them.'

Rowena nodded. 'Don't they talk Scotchy? I nearly laughed!'

'They're jolly pretty,' said The Rainbow. 'And their mother looked topping. I shouldn't think they'd be nasty about the camp because of anything we said, Tanpa.'

'I'll never forgive myself if they are, just because of our silly chatter,' Rowena said anxiously. 'Ask Miss Robinson to find out soon and put us out of our misery, won't you, Guardian dear?'

'I've no doubt my sister and I will go to call on Mrs Mackenzie presently, and perhaps I may be able to say a good word for you about the camp.'

'Oh, do, there's a darling! You're sure to make it all right.'

'But they won't be ready for visitors yet, and we are too busy, in any case. So you will just have to be patient.'

'And think over our misdeeds in the meantime!' Tanpa and Nyoda looked at one another ruefully.

'You two are silly goats, to talk so much!' said the dark girl addressed as Yallani.

Her friend Killooleet chimed in: 'If it had been kids like Samanthy and Phyllis! But The Rainbow! And The Birch Tree!'

'I found that Libby and Tibby were acquainted with me, by repute,' said Miss Helen. 'They guessed who I was at once. Now I want to know what you were saying about me!'

The Rainbow and The Silver Birch looked at one another. 'I don't know!' Rowena said anxiously. 'Not very much, I'm sure, Uda.'

'I don't remember. But it could only be something nice, you know, Firefly, because there isn't anything else,' The Rainbow argued.

Miss Helen laughed. 'But I want to know, Nyoda! Can't you remember at all?'

'Lib asked if you hadn't a name too, and I told her you were Uda, and that it meant The Firefly. And—oh yes, I know! We talked about last year's camp, and how you had to go back and fetch those two sillies—Yallani and Killooleet.'

'And about the time Phyllis cut her foot, and you tied it up. That was all, really, Uda. That wasn't very awful, was it?'

Miss Helen laughed again. 'I feel quite relieved. It might have been anything, since Tanpa is the culprit.'

'Oh, Guardian, that's mean of you!' Rowena protested indignantly.

'It might have been worse, certainly. But after this, please don't discuss me, or our private doings, when strangers are present. Now, if you can do without me, I'll go and talk over camping prospects with my sister.'

'We never like to do without you, but sometimes we know we have to,' The Rainbow assured her.

She laughed, and left them to finish their tea, and then to hurry in for study-hour.

'I do like the way she comes along to tea, "unexpected like," now and then,' Rose said warmly.

'She saved us from a dose of Mademoiselle to-day. Samanthy and the rest have got Madam, so they're all right. But isn't it weird about those girls going to Woody Dean?' And they discussed Libby and Tib and the prospects of the summer camp till the bell rang.

CHAPTER VIII.
SUPPER FOR FOUR.

While the Brownies were enjoying their first picnic supper of the term, grouped on the sloping banks of the cricket-field, Libby and Tib, with the same instinct for the open air, carried a basket of provisions to the Sycamore Wood, and encamped beside the stream. They spread a small cloth, took loaf, butter, cheese, and a dish of potted meat from the basket, and Lib began to cut sandwiches, while Tibby rummaged for apples and biscuits and scones.

But suddenly she dropped a handful of scones and ran up the bank towards the road. 'I heard bicycle bells. Perhaps it's those boys again,' she called, in answer to Lib's question; and Libby found her standing in the road, waving her arms like a windmill.

Ribby and Perks came flying down the road, and each swerved to one side and passed her safely, just to show she could not stop them unless they wished to stop. Then they slackened speed, and came back to remonstrate.

'What d'you want now, you silly kid? Do you spend all day stopping men on bikes?'

'Men!' laughed Tibby. 'Where are they? I don't see any men! Can't you stop and talk? Are you in a frightful hurry?'

'Frantic. We haven't had any supper.'

'We'll give you some. We're having ours in the wood.'

'Oh, all right! I don't mind stopping for a minute or two!' Ribby said carelessly, and wheeled his cycle under the trees.

'What have you got?' Perks demanded cautiously.

'Nothing to drink, I'm afraid. We're going to have that when we get home. But there are oranges and apples, and plenty of bread. I'll cut some sandwiches for you,' Lib said hospitably.

'That'll do.' Perks's gracious tone implied that the favour lay in his acceptance.

Libby began to laugh.

Tib stared indignantly; then, 'Well, I do think'—— she began.

'Why are you always riding up and down our road?' Lib interrupted hastily, handing Perks a sandwich. 'And why aren't you at school? You said your sisters went to the big school over there, and they've begun. Don't you go to school too?'

'We don't begin till next week. As for your road—first time I've heard it called that, by the way!—our grandmother lives at Eastwood, and this is the quickest way, and she's ill. Mother wants more news than she can get in letters. See?'

'She's better, though,' Ribby added. 'So we sha'n't have to go on haunting you all next week.'

'And do you go away to school?'

Ribby's face fell. For the first time he looked unhappy. 'No; we go to a beastly day-school in the town. Awfully rotten luck. Oh, it's a decent enough school for other chaps, I dare say, but I want to go to Harrow. And the mater's got some silly idea'——

'Ribs is always groggy in the winter—least, he used to be,' Perks said unfeelingly. 'Bronchitis, you know, and so on; so they won't let him go away to school'——

'Oh, shut up! Stow it!' growled his afflicted elder brother wrathfully.

'And they won't let me go because he can't. Awfully rough on me! If he wasn't such an ass'——

'Oh, dry up, Percy!' Ribby threw the core of his apple at him, and turned to Libby. 'Can I have another? Sure it won't leave you short? Thanks awfully! The girls have all the luck in

our house. They live at school, and have a bully time.'

'But you said their school was so silly!'

'Oh—er—yes!' Ribby's face brightened. He had forgotten this for the moment. 'Well, it is, of course; awfully cracked and kiddy. But it's all right for girls. They like it. I tell you my sister's crazy for beads, and she's older'n I am.'

But Libby had seen the gleam in his eyes again, and had her doubts of him. 'And the round white things to sew on her sleeves?' she asked severely. 'Is she keen on them too?'

'T'other one is—the little one. Oh, you don't get both! Either beads or the other, but not both, however good you are!'

'I don't believe any of it,' Lib said promptly, 'but you can go on and tell us some more.'

'Sha'n't tell you anything, if you aren't going to believe me!'

'Then I won't give you any more supper!' Libby held the upper hand, and knew it.

Ribs laughed and surrendered. 'They play they're Indians. And sometimes they're soldiers. They're always pretending to be something they aren't.'

'What awful babies!' said Tibby, round-eyed and wondering. 'Not the big ones, surely? They wouldn't go on like that!'

'Oh, don't they just? My sister's sixteen, and she plays she's a Red Indian.'

'Well, I do think it sounds a silly school!'

Lib had been watching Ribby closely. 'What would she say if she could hear you talking like that?'

Both boys began to laugh.

'She'd burst,' Perks said calmly. 'She'd simply burst with rage.'

'She'd be jumping mad,' Ribby acknowledged. 'She's so awfully keen on it all. But every word of it's true. I'm going to tell her some day when I really want to rile her.'

'We'll have a first-class bust-up when you do,' Perks said enjoyably. 'Hope I'll be there!'

'They're always pretending to be something else at that school,' Ribby went on. 'They call the babies Blue Birds. It's a fact! Sounds like a fairy-tale, doesn't it? The big ones are soldiers or Indians, and the tiny kids are Blue Birds.'

'And they're all called Robins and Brownies,' Tib added.

'Say, d'you know any of them?' Ribby looked up in sudden alarm.

'No—yes—well, we heard that in the village. But some of them were in the train with us yesterday, and we heard their names. We didn't know they were coming to this school when we saw you yesterday, but we found out in the village this morning.'

'Say, which of them did you see? Did you talk to them?' demanded Ribby, a touch of uneasiness in his tone.

'There were Rose and Sybil, and Dorothy and Cicely and Phyllis, and one of the mistresses, Miss Betts'—— Libby was watching him closely.

'And Rowena and Sammy!' Tib added swiftly. 'They live near here, but they'd been up to town to see somebody'——

'Oh, my aunt!' Perks was rolling on the grass in an ecstasy of delight. 'They'll give you away, Ribs, old chap, sure as eggs! They're sure to see them again, and they'll tell them all you said, and then Weena'll be on the warpath! And Sammy'll have three fits! Hope I don't miss it!'

Ribby, after the first shock, laughed too. 'Well, I stick to all I said. Every word of it was true. Weena won't like it, of course, because she cares so much about her precious'——

'Now don't you go and give away any more!' Perks advised him. 'You've told them quite enough. You'll have Sam on to you too, when she hears about it. "Playing soldiers"! "Little, round, white circles to stitch on their frocks"! Oh, my precious aunt! Sammy'll want to scratch your eyes out, Ribs, old chap!'

The girls were listening, bright-eyed and eager. 'They said their brothers had been to town with them, but had come home early,' Libby said breathlessly. 'You're their boys, then? Rowena and Sammy are your sisters?'

'They said you were scared of so many girls,' Tib added.

'Not half! We couldn't stand that at any price. We knew they'd be all right with that school lot, so we came home early. Mother rowed us a bit for leaving them, and then sent us off to ask for granny, so when we saw you yesterday we hadn't seen them. They'd gone off to school when we got back,' Ribby condescended to explain. 'So we didn't hear about their meeting you.'

'I'm glad you're their boys!' Tibby said, with much satisfaction. 'Now I feel more as if I knew them! I'm going to be friends with Sammy soon.'

Ribby gave an expressive grunt, for her tone had implied that he and Perks were unimportant possessions attached to the girls, as if she had said, 'I'm glad you're their dogs!'

'Yes, it makes us seem nearer being friends with them. But now tell me something in earnest!' Libby demanded seriously. 'You have such queer names in your family! We never heard of a Rowena before, or Samanthy!'

'Oh yes, you did—or else your education's been neglected. What about *Ivanhoe*?'

'I mean outside a book, of course.'

'That's where our Weena comes from,' Perks laughed.

'It's this way.' Ribby stretched himself on the ground and began to explain. 'Got another sandwich? They're topping. Thanks! Well, Weena was the first of us, and father named her. He said he was going to have jolly names for his kids, and he'd always been a bit romantic and keen on novels, and so on. So he named Rowena out of Scott. Mother said it was silly, and she added Mary, and meant to call her that, but somehow we never do. Mother was brought up in America, and she's frantically practical in everything, and when I came along she said it was her turn, and called me after her father—John Ribble. But somehow I'm never called Jack, as I ought to be'——

'Not likely, Ribs, old chap! Not in our house!' Perks grinned.

'Sam was the next,' Ribby went on. 'Mother said it was her turn again, because she hadn't had a chance to name a girl yet. So father gave in, though he wanted to call her Enid Elaine. It's just as well he didn't; 'twouldn't have suited her a scrap.'

'Enid Elaine!' Perks mocked. 'Good old Sammy!'

'Mother called her Samantha, after the old aunt who'd brought her up in America; but she said she knew Samantha was a queer name in England, so she tacked on Jane, after herself—father always calls her Jane—and said we could call the kid Jenny. D'you think we ever do it? She's never been anything but Sammy. Mother used to call her Samanthy, because it reminded her of her aunt, and Weena was just beginning to talk, and she caught it, and used to call the kid "Fammy," and she's been Sam ever since. Suits her, too.'

'Yes, I think it does,' Libby agreed.

'And I suppose your father said it was his turn again when you were born?' Tib turned to Perks.

'Sure enough,' he laughed. 'And I came off worst of all, for, as dad couldn't have Enid Elaine for Sammy, he insisted on Percival for me. Ghastly, isn't it? Mother got him to tack on James, and, as usual, she thought I'd be Jim. But do you suppose those three rotters would stick to anything so ordinary as Jim? Not much!'

'Be thankful it wasn't Galahad or Launcelot, old chap. That would have been the limit. If you'll call me Jack, I'll call you Jim,' Ribby offered. 'You don't suppose I'm keen on Ribs, do you?'

‘The girls’ names are nicer than yours,’ Libby decided. ‘And now tell us what all that nonsense about the school meant.’

Ribby sat up with a jerk. ‘Nonsense!’ he said indignantly. ‘And me doing my best to interest you! Of all the ungrateful things—— I’m going home! I haven’t told you a single thing that isn’t true!’

‘No; but you made it sound silly, didn’t you?’ Libby insisted.

His eyes danced, as he wheeled his cycle out to the road. ‘See you again later!’ he said airily.—‘Come on, Perks!—Oh, by the way, thanks awfully for the grub!’

‘Wasn’t half bad,’ Perky Jim condescended to say. ‘Now we must go home and get our supper.’

‘Get their supper!’ Tibby said indignantly. ‘They’ve had quite half of ours!’

‘Boys are very queer,’ Libby said seriously, as they returned to their empty baskets. ‘I don’t believe all that stuff about the school. There’s something in it, of course, but not as he puts it. He’s only teasing.’

‘Just fancy Rowena and Sammy being their sisters! When we do make friends with them, we’ll tell them all about meeting their boys! Won’t they be surprised?’

Libby looked thoughtful. ‘I think we’ll ask the boys first.’

‘Ask them what? If we may tell their sisters we’ve got to know them?’

‘No; I meant all they’ve been telling us. They said it would make the girls angry if they knew.’

‘Serves Ribby right! He shouldn’t have said it!’

‘No; but when he did say it he hadn’t any idea we knew his sisters. It seems a bit mean to go and tell,’ Lib explained carefully. ‘Don’t you feel the same? He looked quite upset when you said we knew Rowena and Sammy. I don’t want to be mean.’

‘ ’Tisn’t mean a bit! He should have been more careful.’

‘All the same, he didn’t know, and I wouldn’t like it myself if some one went and repeated all I’d been saying, when it wasn’t meant to be repeated. You wouldn’t like it either, Tib. We must play fair. Next time we meet them I shall ask him if he really minds.’

Tib pouted. ‘There’s not the slightest need. He’ll say we’re not to tell, and I want to see what Sammy says about it. I’m going to tell her, too!’

‘Well, you’re not going to do it till I’ve asked the boys. If they really ought not to have said so much to us, they can tell the girls themselves, if that will make things any better for them.’

‘You’re too awfully particular, Libby!’ Tib said indignantly.

‘I’d rather be too particular than not particular enough!’ Lib retorted.

‘And I’m not, I suppose?’

‘I never said so! Oh, Tibby, don’t be horrid! Those silly boys aren’t worth it. They’ve only left us one apple. Will you have it?’

‘Oh, I’ll go halves! And they say they’ve gone home to get some supper! Aren’t boys greedy pigs?’ Tibby’s wrath turned from her sister to the boys again.

‘Awful!’ Lib agreed cheerfully. ‘It’s a good thing we brought a whole loaf! There won’t be much left! I’m afraid we’ve had more than our rations to-night!’

‘We! *We* haven’t! But somebody else has!’ Tib retorted.

CHAPTER IX.
THE LETTER A ROBIN BROUGHT.

'We'll go down to the village, and then we'll go opposite ways, and see who can find the most exciting thing to tell the other one,' said Tibby, after midday dinner next day. 'I must do something interesting, after weeding all morning!'

'Couldn't we go together?' Lib suggested wistfully.

'Oh, I think it would be more fun to go separately! If we go together we've nothing to tell one another afterwards.'

Libby quite saw that point of view, but preferred her own. She yielded; but the fact that Tib found it 'more fun' to go alone hurt her. She hid her sore feeling, however. She could never speak of the things which hurt her most, and this was one of them.

Her discovery was soon made. They parted at the pond, and Tibby wandered through the village, frankly stating her intention of finding the boys, if possible. Libby turned at once to the church, and found a treasure.

The little parish church, almost hidden among great drooping elms, sycamores, and chestnuts, was a place of pilgrimage for thousands of tourists every year. The village had once been the home of a world-famous artist, and out of the love in his heart for the little church, he had beautified it with wonderful windows of his own design. Three warrior saints guarded the altar; figures of beautiful women, with backgrounds of richest green and blue, looked down upon it from each side, with angels and cherubim, and tiny scenes from sacred story. The faces were marvellous in their purity, and in the delicacy and strength of their lines; the colours magnificent in their warmth and grandeur. The church itself was very simple, with the severe beauty of Early English arches and lancet windows, but seemed on that account all the more suitable as a setting for its glory of coloured glass. In a corner outside the artist himself lay buried, and visitors divided their tribute between his resting-place and the wonder of his handiwork, which had enriched it so lovingly.

This was Libby's discovery, and she sat long gazing up at the lady-saints and warriors in the little chancel. Tib's, as might have been expected, was more exciting. She came flying back in half-an-hour to find her sister, and met Libby at the lich-gate, looking up at the square, gray tower and old red roof from the outside.

'I've seen the girls again, and I've found out why they're called Robins!' she announced exultantly.

Libby came to earth swiftly. 'Oh, how? How clever of you, Tib! Where are they?'

'I met some of them going for a walk with Miss Betts and another mistress. I'd have liked to speak to them, for Sammy was there, and she knew me, too, and Dorothy and Sybil and Cicely and Phyllis. They all knew me, and they did stare! I think they must have been talking about us. But I couldn't speak to them, of course. They went away up the road and along the cliffs.'

'What a windy way to choose! They'll be blown right across the Downs!'

'I suppose that's why they're Robins to-day,' Tib laughed. 'Every one of them was wearing a crimson knitted cap, and a crimson jersey over her brown tunic! They looked awfully neat, and ready for any amount of wind. But I guess that's why the village people call them Robins—the red and brown, you know.'

At Lib's suggestion they climbed the hill by the windmill, and lying in the wind, saw the procession of girls pass along the road below. The crimson caps and jerseys looked warm and useful and neat, and with plaited hair the Robins could afford to ignore the wind. Thereafter

Libby and Tib knew that on sunny days they would be Brownies, in shady hats and tunics with cool white sleeves, but that when a gale was blowing the dots scattered over the hills or marching along the road would be Robins.

'You could tell what the weather was by just seeing one of them!' Tibby laughed.

They came to call days of hot sunshine 'Brownie days,' and chilly windy ones, when they felt the need of their own blue caps and coats, 'Robin days.' The following Saturday was distinctly a Brownie day, and one brief visit to the crowded village, with its mobs of tourists and seething tea-shops, was enough for the girls. They retired to the quietness of the Woody Dean valley, and from the top of the big south down watched the clouds of dust from the motors on the high-road, and looked across at the big cricket-field behind the school, where a match was in progress. The sloping banks where the girls sat at supper-time were crowded with Brownies, an eager, critical audience; the teams wore white, and played bareheaded, but put on their red jerseys when they sat down to rest and cool off.

Lib and Tib lay on the turf on their distant down and watched them enviously.

'They do have a good time! I'm beginning to be quite sure I wouldn't mind going to that school—sometime, you know!' Lib remarked.

'Wonder if they ever do any lessons?'

'Oh, we've never seen them out in the mornings or evenings, except at supper-time! They have time for heaps of work.'

'I suppose they'll be in church to-morrow?'

'I should think they'd half-fill that wee church. There won't be much room for visitors.'

But Sunday brought disappointment. The big school had its own chapel, and the girls did not come to the parish church. Lib and Tib were keenly disappointed, but the sight of Ribby and Perks—or was it John and James on Sundays?—was some compensation.

As they left the church, a handsome chestnut-haired lady, with a distinct look of Rowena and Sammy about her, came up to Mrs Mackenzie, and said pleasantly, 'I believe our young people have already made one another's acquaintance—your girls and my boys. If I may, I will call as soon as you are ready for visitors.'

This was evidently the practical American mother, whom 'father always called Jane.' Mrs Mackenzie thanked her cordially, and then they both laughed, for Tibby, just behind, was making an appointment with Perks.

'Lib wants to speak to Ribby. We've been looking for you for days—all yesterday, anyway. When will you come? This afternoon?'

'What d'you want?' Ribby asked of Lib. 'We're all going to Eastwood this afternoon. Will to-morrow do?'

'Yes. Meet us on the cliffs in front of the school in the afternoon. We've never been along there yet.'

'Right-o! We'll be there about two.'

But before the appointment could be kept a great event had occurred. Libby and Tib, returning from a before-breakfast walk next morning, were astounded to see a Robin cycling out of the front-gate of Woody Dean, and away down the lane towards the village. She was a tall girl whom they did not know, though she had seen them before, being, indeed, that Vera who had been the first to remark on them to Samanthy after meeting them in the village. She smiled at them as she passed, for the goodwill of the Woody Dean girls was worth cultivating, and she liked the look of the sisters, in any case. They gazed after her, hardly believing their own eyes, then ran to the house to find out what it meant.

'Mother! A Brownie—here! Whatever did she want?'

'No—a Robin!' Libby laughed. 'Mother dear, did we really see her, or did we dream it?'

Mrs Mackenzie was absorbed in a letter propped against the coffee-pot. 'One moment!' she laughed. 'She came to bring a note from Miss Robinson. Just let me read it, and then I'll tell you all about it. The first part of the letter,' she said presently to the impatient girls, 'is recalling old times, when I was a schoolgirl in her care. But the part that really concerns you two, and concerns you very deeply, you shall hear. This is it: "Now I want to ask a favour of you, my dear Elizabeth. My girls, or rather a certain section of them, have for the past three years enjoyed a week's camping-out soon after the beginning of the summer term, and another in July. We have all the necessary outfit, tents, &c., but the exactly suitable spot for their camp has been difficult to find. They have tried one or two situations, and by far the most suitable in every way was last year's camping-ground, when they had two most successful weeks in the grounds of Woody Dean, by the courtesy of your predecessors. The exact spot they favour is among the trees near the stream, higher up the valley than the house" ' — —

'In the Sycamore Wood!' Lib and Tib spoke together. 'Oh, will they come again this year? How simply splendid! We can see the camp, can't we, mother?'

'We shall have to talk that over, of course. Miss Robinson adds: "We paid a small sum for the use of the wood for the week, and the girls were also glad to give help in the garden in various small ways, weeding and so on, in return for the hospitality extended to us. I think it well they should do this; it is good for them to feel they are helping to pay their way by giving service even of a small kind. They can only be in camp during the early morning and evening, of course; I expect them back at school by nine each day for their ordinary classes, but we allow the campers to do their preparation work in the afternoon, and excuse their attendance at games and walk, thus setting them free to return to camp by half-past four, and to spend the evening as they please." '

'What a jolly plan! Oh, mother, you'll let them come?'

' "The campers number about forty, and they are always in the charge of my sister and one of the mistresses, to whom they give implicit obedience. I am sure you would find them no trouble, if you can see your way to lending us the wood for a week during the present month. The question of a second camp later on in the term will depend upon the conduct of the girls on this first occasion, but if you will give them a trial, I hope and believe you will have no grounds for complaint of their behaviour." ' Mrs Mackenzie looked up suddenly, and caught the grimace which passed from one of her daughters to the other. 'Well?' she asked severely. 'What was that for, Libby?'

'Sounds so schoolmistressy, mother, that's all.'

'She *is* a schoolmistress!' her mother laughed. 'Now what are we to say in reply to this request? Suppose your father has no objections, what do you two say?'

'Oh, say yes! Oh, please say yes, mother!'

'And ask them to come as soon as ever they can,' Libby added.

'You would like to have them here? You have talked of using the wood for picnics, but you would have to give it up to these girls for the week, you know.'

'We'd like to! But they'd let us see the camp, wouldn't they?' Tib asked anxiously. 'They wouldn't expect us to keep away all the time!'

'We couldn't possibly pretend we didn't know it was there,' Libby urged.

Mrs Mackenzie looked thoughtful. Nothing could be more helpful to her hopes of making her girls find friends in the school than this camping idea; but Miss Robinson must be consulted and must give her consent to the friendship before Lib and Tib were allowed to haunt the camp, as they certainly would do.

So, after consultation with their father, she wrote her reply, and read parts of it to the girls before she sent it off. She explained to Miss Robinson that their reason for choosing this particular south coast town had been to allow Elizabeth and Isobel to grow familiar with the

school, and with the idea of living there, before they were sent there in the autumn, and that if they could become acquainted with any of the girls personally it would help considerably towards this end.

'We shall be delighted if your girls will camp in the wood,' she went on, 'but I would like to make plain two points before they come. We will accept the small rent you mention, but we do not wish the girls to do any work for us. Let them have all the time which they can spare from school-work for enjoyment; we should not be happy to think they were toiling on our behalf. Our garden is in a deplorable state, of course, but we hope to get the weeds under in time. My husband is a keen gardener, and the work is good for him; but our own girls can and do help him, and we need not trouble yours. The other point is this—I hope you will allow our girls to visit the camp. It would be difficult to keep them away. I should feel it a hard thing to ask of them, for they are keenly interested in your "Robins" and "Brownies" already. So I hope you will sanction their presence in and about the camp if they can make friends with your girls; it is better they should be there with your permission. I may say our girls are delighted with the thought of meeting yours in this way, and beg that you will allow your girls to come as soon as possible.'

'And to stay as long as possible!' Libby pleaded. 'Oh, mother, couldn't they have more than a week?'

'I expect it is too much of an interruption to their classes to be extended beyond a week. Now you can take this letter and hand it in at the school.'

'Oh!' Libby looked alarmed. 'Shall we see anybody?'

'A maid, possibly,' her mother laughed. 'No one who will eat you, anyway.'

'The Brownies are always out in the afternoon,' Tib added. 'All right, mother! The sooner she gets the letter, the sooner we'll know if they're coming.'

'We have to go up that side of the hills to meet the boys,' Libby agreed.

'But I don't quite see why they shouldn't do some weeding, if they're willing to!' Tibby had worked hard for a couple of hours, much against her will, and the thought of Brownie-assistants was enticing. 'If there are forty of them and they all did a little, it would come to quite a lot! It might even make some difference to our garden if forty of them worked hard for a week!'

'Oh, I think it's nicer not to let them do any work!'

'I think they ought to do it!' Tib insisted. 'There's plenty to do! I'm sure they could get the grass out of the front-path quite as well as I can, and it's jolly hard work. *I* should let them weed if they want to!'

CHAPTER X.
MEETINGS.

A strong wind was blowing up from the sea, laden with flying specks of rain, as if there might be a heavy downpour as soon as the breeze dropped. The girls walked through the village, fully agreed that it was a 'Robin day,' and wearing their own blue caps and mackintoshes. At the gate of the big school they stopped and hesitated.

'You take it in, Tib!' Libby suggested.

'Not much! Not alone, anyway. You're the eldest. But I'll come with you. Oh, look at the cat!'

A small gray cat, with regular dark stripes round his body, chest, and legs, came walking sedately down the front-path and out by the big gate. He turned into the road with a very definite air of knowing where he was going, and was marching off towards the village, when Tib sprang after him.

'He'll get lost! Shall I take him back?'

But the cat whisked an indignant bushy tail in her face, and shot away from her and down the road like a small gray rocket, and Tibby turned to the gate again. 'I shouldn't have thought a cat would want to be out on a day like this!'

'He's quite made up his mind about it, anyway. Come on and back me up, Tib!'

Each window in each row was a separate staring eye to their imaginations as they went up to the front-door and knocked, quaking in their shoes. But the voices of the Robins could be heard from the cricket-field, where practice at the nets was in progress, so they could not be watching, and the maid who took in the letter looked very harmless. Much relieved, the girls hurried away, and went out on to the cliffs to wait for the boys.

'I suppose they were talking about *us*, that day in the train!' Tib laughed, at a sudden thought.

'When? How could they? They didn't know us.'

'No; and they didn't know we were the new people who were going to live at Woody Dean! Don't you remember? They said this year's camp depended on the people who had taken the house, and Sammy said if they were pigs they might not be willing for a camp.'

Libby laughed. 'Oh, well, they didn't know! I'm glad father and mother were willing. It would have been horrid to feel we'd refused.'

'Yes; we'd have felt we were pigs every time we met them! Here come the boys!'

'You've turned up, then?' Ribby greeted them with a shout.

'Why not? Didn't you expect us to?'

'Well, it's raining, and going to be worse.'

'Poof!' said Tibby. 'You don't call this raining? It's just a bit misty. You should see it rain at home among the hills! You can't see anything for the rain there!'

'I hate umbrellas,' Lib added. 'I don't mind rain a scrap, but I do draw the line at holding up an umbrella all the time—unless I've my best hat on, of course.'

The boys laughed, agreeing heartily. These girls, with their long mackintoshes and little caps, Libby with her long hair tucked out of sight under her coat, obviously did not care how hard it rained or how far they walked in a storm. The boys approved of them thoroughly, though they did not say so.

Ribby turned to Lib. 'What did you want to say to me?'

'Do you really mind if we tell your sisters what you said about the school? They're coming to camp in our wood, so we're sure to get to know them; and Tibby's wild to tell your

Sammy all you've been saying, and ask her what you meant by it. But you said it would make them angry, and I thought it was hardly fair. When you told us, you didn't know we knew them.'

'Oh, you haven't told them yet, then?' Perks laughed. 'Ribby's been shaking in his shoes, and watching the post for a raging letter from Weena.'

Libby looked at Ribby. 'If you'd really rather we didn't tell'——

He laughed. 'No fear! It's awfully decent of you to ask me first, but I'll stand by what I said. I'm not funky of Weena, and every word of it was true.'

'But you'd altered it to make it sound silly!' Libby insisted.

Ribby grinned. 'You can tell the girls, anyway. It'll touch 'em up a bit. Oh, I'd rather you'd tell them. Perks would give me away next time they come home, if you didn't. Weena may as well work off her feelings in a letter. But, I say! tell them on a Monday, will you?'

'On a Monday? But why? Whatever do you mean?'

Ribby grinned again. 'They sometimes come home for week-ends. Give 'em time to cool down a bit, don't you know! Oh yes, you'd better tell them! I owe Weena something, because she's never let me see one of their meetings.'

'Meetings?' Tib asked eagerly. 'What kind of meetings? What do they do?'

'Can't say. We've never seen one,' said Perks.

'But, according to Weena, they're frightfully private and mysterious affairs. Her lot are the ones that play at being Indians, you know;' and Ribby's eyes danced again.

'Do they really? She looks too big for making-believe,' Lib said doubtfully.

'Oh, but they do! They dress up like Red Indians, and sit round a fire, and say weird verses and sing things. That's all we know about it. Weena's dress is first-class—I will say that for her; and she looks topping in it.'

'But not a scrap like an Indian,' Perks added. 'How could she, with hair that colour? If you put a horse-chestnut on Weena's head you can't see it; it's so exactly the colour of her hair.'

'You've all got it. You and Ribby are just the same,' Tib observed. 'I'd like to see Rowena dressed up. Do the others all have dresses too?'

'Oh, rather! All her lot. Sammy's set go in for uniforms.'

'How can they? What are they like?'

'You said they pretended to be soldiers,' Lib remarked. 'Do they have meetings too?'

'They call 'em parades. They drill, and go marching, and they swank about it no end.'

'What are their uniforms like?' Tib's eyes were eager.

'Blue, with big hats, and bits of ribbon, and knives and whistles and things hanging on to them.'

Ribby chuckled at this description. 'Sammy'd have a fit if she could hear you, Perks.—We wanted to watch one of their meetings,' he explained to Libby, 'so we asked Weena to fix it for us—an Indian one, you know. But she wouldn't hear of it—said they were most awfully private.'

'But don't they have them at school? How could you watch one?'

'They always have one, at least, while they're camping, so we thought we'd see it last year at Woody Dean. But it was no go. Weena was just like an oyster about it; wouldn't tell us even when it was to be, and we couldn't haunt the wood every night on the chance.'

'We did go one night,' Perky Jim remarked. 'And they were all sitting round a big fire and singing, just as she said. But it wasn't a meeting. They weren't dressed up, and they hadn't any beads on, and they never have a meeting without beads! Sammy's lot were there too, all mixed up with Weena's. They never mix up for real meetings.'

'It sounds awfully mysterious!' Tibby groaned. 'I want to know all about it just frantically!'

Libby's eyes were wistful. 'Will they have a meeting this summer at the camp? Mother said we could make friends with them. Oh, I wonder' — —

'Perhaps they'd let girls watch, though they wouldn't have boys!' Tib said hopefully.

'I say, you'd better be getting home. There's going to be a regular sea-mist. You'll be scared,' Ribby suggested. 'Look at it rolling up from the sea!'

While they talked they had been strolling along the springy turf of the cliff-edge, up slopes, and down into deep hollows, and then up again, with the sea breaking on the shingle at the foot of the cliffs on the one hand, and the road and then wide open Downs on the other. They had all been talking too hard to notice the thickening mist, but now they turned to look, and found it, as Ribby had said, rolling up from the sea in clouds. The air was still full of flying moisture, but the rain was no heavier than it had been, and yet presently they found themselves wrapped in a clammy gray blanket of fog, and the road, the Downs, the sea, and even the edge of the cliff disappeared.

'I say!' Tibby laughed. 'I thought we came away from home because the winters were so damp and cold! How about the sunny south of England? In May, too! Let's go home again, Libby! What is the weather playing at?'

'A little game of its own invention. It doesn't often do it,' Ribby assured her. 'It's only taken this way occasionally. I apologise for it. It will get over it soon.'

'May take two days, though,' Perks said cheerfully.

'I say, where are you going, Tibby, you ass? That's the English Channel over there, though you might not think it.'

'I want to look over the edge. It's so queer—when you can't see any edge!'

'No, you don't! Not if I know it! It's two hundred feet to the bottom, and you'd be a jolly little mess on the shingle before you knew.'

'Oh, well!' Tib retreated to satisfy him, for the sound of the invisible breakers on unseen shingle was eerie in the extreme. 'But I'm not quite an idiot, or a baby, Perks.'

He grinned. 'We don't want to have to take you home to your ma on a shovel.'

'You horrid creature!—Isn't it weird, Libby?' and Tib tucked her arm through her sister's.

'Awfully!' Libby stood watching the damp, cloudy mist rolling past them towards the Downs. 'If it was raining it wouldn't be so queer; but it isn't, really. I wouldn't like to be caught in this out on the Downs! We'd never find our way home.'

'No; we'd have to sit under a bush till it cleared.'

As they strolled homewards, keeping well away from the cliff-edge, and marvelling at the smoke-like wreaths and coils of mist which swept up from the sea, even the glowing golden masses of buttercups which edged the path were invisible till they were almost upon them. And as they went home through the village they found, to their amazement, that even the little round pond before the church was 'smoking,' giving off clouds of mist just as the sea was doing.

'Father will think he's come to the wrong place to find sunshine!' Tibby laughed.

As they leaned on the railing gazing at the 'curious natural phenomenon' of the pond, as Ribby called it, along the road which led out into the country came a party of Robins, walking in rank in charge of a mistress, a tall, fair-haired young lady. The Robins were all dressed in mackintoshes and crimson caps, and without exception they fixed their eyes on the 'Woody Dean girls' as they passed the pond.

Suddenly Ribby chuckled, and at the same instant Tib turned to Perks with laughing eyes. 'There's your Sammy! I say, won't she be surprised to see us with you?'

Sammy was surprised; there was no doubt of that. She was astounded, in fact; and almost lost her place in the line as she stared with wide, incredulous eyes. Phyllis and Dorothy,

behind, hustled her on, and she turned to Cicely with a gasp. 'The Woody Dean girls—with Ribby and Perks! How—how weird!'

'Yes, of course, it's awfully weird,' those behind assured her. 'But you needn't stop us all in the road, Samanthy. It jolly well is those girls who were in the train.'

'It jolly well is our boys! Mother hasn't told us they'd made friends. I must write and find out how it happened! Weena'll be frightfully interested!'

'Sammy's trying to work out how it happened,' Perks laughed, as the girls passed on. 'It's jolly hard luck on her not to be able to come along and ask.'

'She's pining to know all about it. 'Twon't hurt her to pine a little,' Ribby said unfeelingly.

'She doesn't know Tib's in the habit of rolling down hills and bashing into cyclists,' Perky Jim laughed.

CHAPTER XI.
THE HOISTING OF THE FLAG.

Perks's gloomy forecast was not fulfilled. The chilly sea-mist wrapped the village closely for a few hours, then slipped away in the night, and the next morning was clear and sunny again. Libby and Tib watched the schoolgirls returning from an afternoon walk—an elder party this time, for Rowena and Rose were there, and Vera, who had brought the letter. They were Brownies to-day, for they had only been for a botany walk across the Downs, and could indulge in more easy-going costume than a walk along the highroads would have demanded. So they wore the comfortable brown tunics, and carried their hats, or slung them on their arms or over their shoulders, or pinned them on their breasts, so that their hands might be free.

It was the last day of the holidays for Ribby and Perks, but Lib and Tib were not greatly distressed on this account, though they had enjoyed their meetings with the boys. They soon found a new interest in life, and an absorbing one. The camp was being prepared in the Sycamore Wood, and Libby and Tib haunted the spot all day long to watch.

Miss Robinson had written her thanks for the use of the ground, giving the date when the girls would arrive, and insisting again that they should be allowed to give some service in return for the hospitality, and that they would be willing to weed or help in other ways in the garden, and could be trusted to do it carefully.

Mr Mackenzie laughed. 'We'll see about that when they come! There's no need for them to work for us, but we won't quarrel with Miss Robinson about it. She seems a very determined lady!'

A few days after the arrangement had been made, two men and a cart appeared at the back-gate of Woody Dean, and announced that they had come to prepare the camp. They were the gardeners from the school, they explained in answer to Tibby's questions, when the girls followed them to the wood to watch the proceedings. The young ladies were to come on the following Wednesday. After that, Libby and Tib only lived for Wednesday evening; all Monday they watched the men at work, and all Tuesday they haunted the camp, looking curiously and very wistfully at all the arrangements.

One large and one small marquee were erected in a large clearing far up the wood near the Chestnut Ring. Close to these stood four small white tents, their pegs driven firmly and the ropes stretched taut by the men. Round each tent was dug a shallow trench, sloping towards the stream; near the smaller marquee was a pit about two feet deep. What these were for the girls had no idea, but the men enlightened them. The shallow trench was in case of heavy rain, to collect water and carry it off to the river; the small marquee was the kitchen tent, and the pit was to hold rubbish which could not be burned, so that it could be buried easily. The large marquee was the dining-room in wet weather.

'They mean to be jolly comfortable!' Tib commented.

Then, to their great surprise, the men began operations on the other bank of the stream, which here was shallow and only two feet wide, but with a steady flow of clear, good water from the Downs. Here, on the opposite side from the camp, the trees stood back a little from the water, leaving a clearing of soft turf, and here also the men began to put up tents. There was no large marquee here, but five more little tents were arranged in a half-circle under the trees.

'Two camps!' Libby said, wondering. 'Why don't they have them all together?'

'Well, you know, the boys say they're in two sets, Rowena's lot and Sammy's, the Indians and the soldiers! Perhaps they'd rather live separately.'

‘But they must be going to join for meals.’

‘Only in wet weather! They’re going to have a kitchen here too.’ For a small square tent was being put up at one end of the ring, near the stream.

‘So that they won’t have to carry their water too far,’ Tib commented. ‘The two kitchens can yell across and ask how the breakfast’s getting on.’

In the middle of the larger camp a deep hole was dug, and a flagstaff planted, and the girls asked eagerly if the men were going to put up a flag. They said no, however; the young ladies would do that when they came.

‘I’m going to see them do it!’ Tibby announced. ‘Miss Robinson said we might make friends.’

‘Yes, but not the first night,’ Lib demurred. ‘We’ll give them time to get settled. We’ll watch from a distance, if you like; I don’t think any one would mind. But we won’t go talking to them and getting in the way the first night. They’ll be far too busy to be bothered with us.’

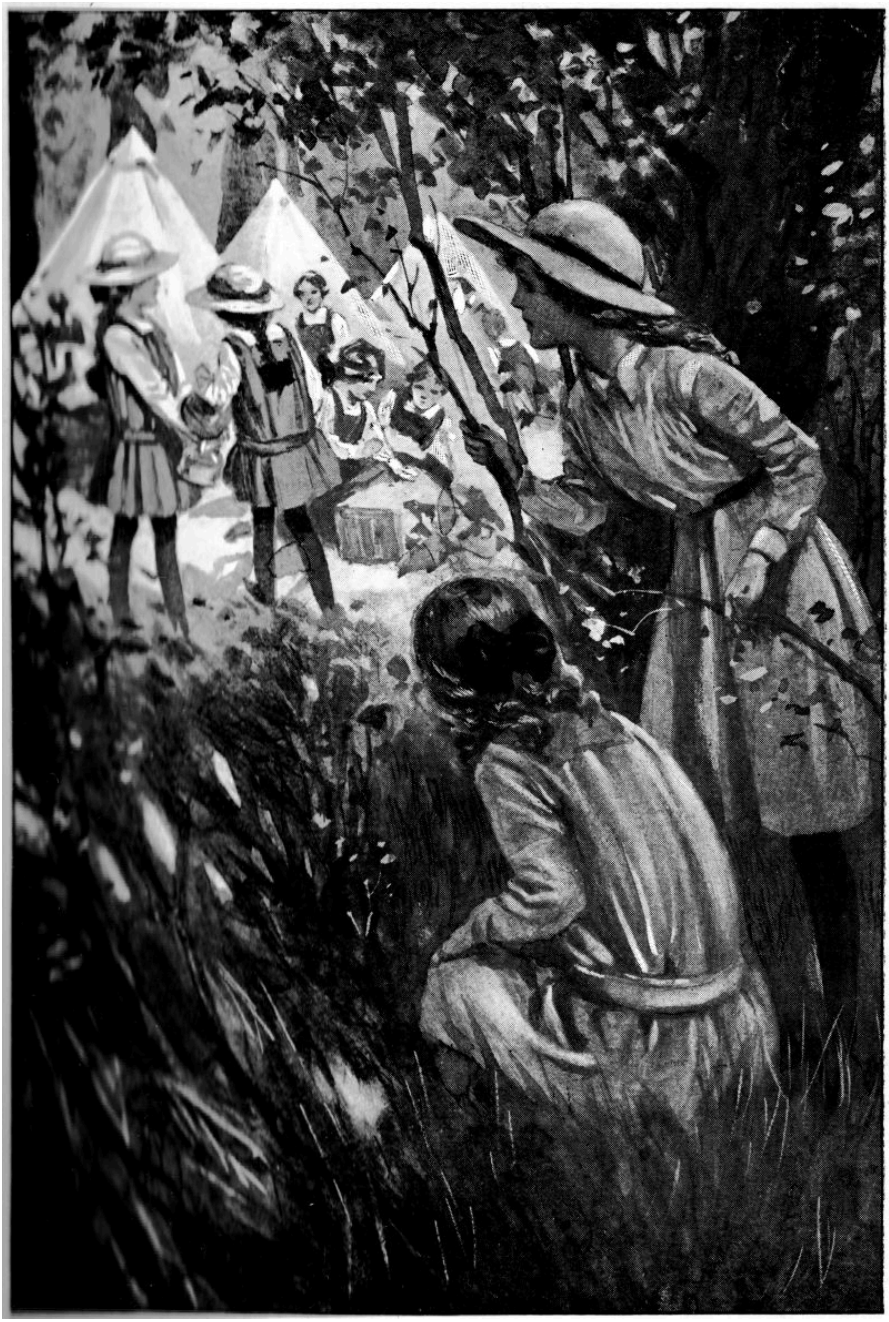
‘I suppose their furniture will come to-day—beds and tables and dishes and cooking-things,’ Tib said eagerly on Wednesday morning. ‘Let’s go and watch! I want to know what they’re going to sleep on.’

But the camp was deserted all day. The cart did not come again, and by tea-time the empty tents still stood waiting for the campers. The girls went home to tea much disappointed, and wondering if something had happened to upset the arrangements.

But tea at Woody Dean was early. By five o’clock Libby and Tib were out on the big hill which sheltered their valley, wandering disconsolately along, and wondering if they would be able to solve the mystery if they climbed to the top and looked across at the school.

Suddenly Libby stopped, and caught Tib’s arm. ‘Listen! I’m sure that’s them!’

With one accord they dropped on the turf—it was easier to hold one’s breath sitting down—and listened, and then in a moment were not only listening, but looking. Round the corner of the lane from the village came a troop of Brownies, laughing, talking, calling to one another. All wore their tunics and shady hats; caps were in their knapsacks and crimson jerseys on their arms, or more often slung round their necks or waists by the sleeves. All carried small rucksacs on their shoulders, and some had bundles, baskets, or attaché-cases as well. Some were on cycles, but the greater number walked. Some carried long, stout poles; half-a-dozen took turns in dragging a small hand-cart piled with luggage; two were taking charge of an immense bulldog, holding him by a leash. A number were acting as guard of honour to two carts, driven by the gardeners; the rest walked in groups before and behind, and all were in the highest spirits, as was evident from the noise which reached even Libby and Tib on their hillside. Presently some one began to sing, and the rest took up the chorus, and the sound rose to the two girls on the hill, though the words were unknown to them—‘Give a cheer! Give a cheer! ‘Rah! Hurrah for the Open Road!’



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Libby and Tib crept near among the bushes.

‘Isn’t it all jolly?’ breathed Libby, as the little procession turned in among the trees of the Woody Dean wood.

'Awfully jolly! We must see what they're doing! Come on, Libby!'

'Well, I'd like to see too,' Libby agreed. 'But I don't think we ought to interrupt them to-night.'

They went down to the road, and crept in among the trees. But the girls in the two camps were far too busy to notice them. Libby and Tib crept near among the bushes, secure in the knowledge that they had permission to make friends, but not wishing to interrupt at such a critical time.

Every one in the two camps was very busy, except the great bulldog, who lay, nose on paws, at the foot of the flagstaff. And walking about the camp, sniffing at every unfamiliar object, was the striped gray cat the girls had seen at the school gate. He had travelled in the arms of a tall Brownie, and was speedily making himself acquainted with his surroundings.

The girls had divided into two parties, and were helping to unload the carts, hats and knapsacks thrown aside. The men were carrying in mattresses, pillows, and blankets, and a small oil-stove to each kitchen tent. A quantity of cooking-utensils of every kind, rugs, some small folding-tables, steamer-chairs, and camp-stools, were piled on the ground, and soon carried off by the Brownies in various directions. As they worked, the girls called to one another, talked and laughed, and sang or whistled snatches of songs. In each camp two girls were busy gathering firewood; and presently Vera and another tall girl, in the larger camp, and Rowena and Rose, in the smaller, knelt and arranged a camp fire scientifically in the middle of each group of tents.

'They must be getting desperate for their tea!' Tibby murmured.

'I expect they had it at school before they came. They'd know how much work there would be to do to-night,' Libby said wisely. 'They'll be getting supper ready soon.'

'It must be awfully jolly to cook your own supper!' Tib sighed enviously.

'Depends on what it's like when it's done!'

'Oh, well, of course! But I expect they'll be so hungry, they won't mind much what it's like. Aren't they going to light the fires?'

'I believe they're going to put up the flag first.' Lib was watching carefully.

A bundle had been laid at the foot of the flagstaff, beside the bulldog, and the gray cat, his investigations finished, was sitting upon it, washing his feet and tail elaborately and persistently. As soon as an outward appearance of order had been given to the camp—the carts emptied, their contents put out of sight, and the men dismissed with many thanks—the mistress in charge of the girls came out and blew a shrill blast on the whistle slung round her neck. She was the tall, fair-haired, and very energetic-looking young lady whom Libby and Tib had seen with the school that misty day. She wore a short-skirted costume of navy blue, with felt hat turned up at the side, and looked very neat and business-like.

'She's calling for them all to come,' Lib murmured. 'Now they'll put up the flag!'

But, instead of coming, the Brownies one and all dived into their tents and disappeared. The hoisting of the flag was the first great event of their camping week, and nothing less than full-dress could do justice to it. Within a minute the camp looked deserted, though from every tent came laughter and chattering, and sounds of utmost haste. The lady in blue walked across to inspect the two camp fires, and seemed satisfied, since she left them alone and went into the kitchens to look at the chaos which no doubt existed there.

'Where have they all gone? What are they doing?' Tibby breathed in her sister's ear.

'I believe they're dressing up. You know what Ribby said about uniforms and Indian dresses. Perhaps it wasn't all teasing, after all!' Lib was breathless with eagerness.

'I say! Do you really think so?'

'That mistress's costume looks rather like a uniform. I thought Ribby was only teasing. Oh, I *do want* to see Rowena and the rest dressed up!'

'I want to see the uniforms. Let's get nearer,' Tib suggested; and they wriggled along the ground, and lay in a patch of long grass.

The mistress in blue came back to the flagstaff and bent over the bundle, chasing away the gray cat, and saying a word to the sleepy bulldog, whose stumpy tail flapped lazily. Then she straightened up, and blew another blast. Tibby gave an anticipatory shiver of delight, and her hand caught and squeezed Libby's arm.

From all the tents in the larger camp came girls in blue—blue skirts and blouses and big blue hats, bright blue ties, and very white whistle-cords slung across their breasts. It was undoubtedly a uniform, and a very neat and serviceable one. Sammy was there, her short chestnut hair quite out of sight under the wide-brimmed felt hat; Dorothy, Cicely, and Phyllis, all with neat fair pigtails, came from the same tent; and Vera, wearing the same uniform, but with a slightly longer skirt and with two long plaits, appeared from another. They all wore coloured ribbons on their shoulders, and caught up the poles they had laid down outside their tents; and—yes, there on their arms were the 'little, round, white circles' of which Perky Jim had told—small discs, containing various devices worked in white thread.

'Look! Perks wasn't telling fibs!' began Tibby excitedly.

'Oh, look! Look!' breathed Libby, and pointed across the stream towards the smaller camp.

From every little tent here came girls in long, graceful gowns of dull fawn linen, with swinging fringe of brown leather at the ankles and under the arms; long chains of bright-coloured beads, swaying as they walked; narrow bands of glittering beadwork across their foreheads, and hair either hanging loose or parted and worn in two braids. Brown-haired Rose and the dark girl Yallani had big, loose plaits; but little Sybil wore hers flowing over her shoulders, under a bright-green head-band. Rowena's splendid chestnut locks made two thick braids on her breast, tied at the ends with beaded tassels.

'I say! They are Indian dresses right enough!' Tibby whispered. 'Aren't they pretty, Lib? But Rowena doesn't look a bit like an Indian, does she?'

Libby said nothing; she was staring with wide, hungry eyes. The Indians formed a procession, Rowena, Rose, and Yallani at their head, and crossing the stream by a plank bridge, came towards the flagstaff. The girls in blue were already standing in a big square, four on each side, a few paces apart, each girl with her staff in her left hand. Outside them the Indian maidens formed a wide ring, a yellow wall outside the blue.

Then from both Libby and Tib broke a gasp of surprise, as the leader of the Indian camp came out of her tent and crossed the plank, and took her place in the middle of the circle, beside the mistress standing there.

'Miss Helen! Oh, isn't she lovely?' breathed Libby. 'She's even prettier than Rowena!'

'What a spiffing dress! And how awfully nice of her to wear it! Some grown-ups wouldn't see the fun of dressing up like the girls, and letting their hair down!' Tib commented. 'What heaps of beads she's got on!'

Miss Helen, in a yellow Indian gown, with her dark brown hair in two heavy plaits on her breast, bent with the uniformed mistress and unrolled the flag from its wrappings. Sammy poked the bulldog with her staff, and he lurched sleepily to his feet.

Two of the elder girls stepped forward from their place in the square, saluted in soldierly fashion, and taking the flag, fixed it deftly in its place on the rope. Then, handling the cords in a way which showed they were familiar with the task, they ran the big Union-Jack up to the top of the mast, all their blue-clad companions standing rigidly at the salute, right hands brought smartly across the breast to touch the upright staff on the left side, eyes fixed on the flag. Their mistress saluted also, and very gracefully every Indian maiden caught up the skirts of her gown and dropped a low curtsy to her country's flag, Miss Helen doing the same. Then,

led by her, they all broke into a ringing cheer, which echoed among the hills, and some one began to sing the National Anthem. All the voices took up the hymn, the blue-clad girls standing at the salute all the while. A short speech from the mistress followed, but Lib and Tib were not near enough to catch the words, and could not tell whether she was addressing them on the subject of the flag or giving orders as to their proceedings in camp.

'She's declaring the bazaar open!' said Tib irreverently.

A voice, which the girls in hiding now recognised as Miss Helen's, gave the note for 'Land of Hope and Glory,' and again all joined in, and the notes rose and swelled and filled all the valley. Then, in the silence which followed, the mistress standing below the flag cried in a ringing voice, 'Three cheers for Camp Woody Dean!'

CHAPTER XII.
THE LIGHTING OF THE FIRE.

The hearty cheers did not quite end the ceremony around the flagstaff. When they were over, the blue girls, at the word of command, 'Stand at *ease*!' all relaxed from their tense position with a sigh of relief, and stood in restful attitudes, many leaning on their staves. Miss Helen moved a little distance from the pole, and looked round at her Indian maidens.

From amongst them came Sybil, the 'shy little gray bird of the woods,' as her Indian name implied, and she certainly looked the part. But she was the youngest girl in the Indian camp, and had to take her part in the ceremony. Flushed and nervous, she went forward shyly and held out to Miss Helen two bundles of dried twigs, bound into rough torches. Match-box in hand, Miss Helen lit one after the other.

'Tanpa! Nyoda! You are our senior Fire-Makers. Come and kindle the camp fires!'

Her voice rang out, though the speech of the other mistress had failed to carry. Rowena and Rose went forward and took the torches. Rose knelt by the nearer pile of sticks; Rowena ran lightly across the plank to the farther camp, and bent over the second fire. The flames began to crackle and the smoke to rise, and the Indian maidens, led by Miss Helen, began to sing, 'Burn, fire, burn! Flicker, flicker, flame!'

The fire-lighters stood triumphant as the flames leapt up and the camp fires burnt merrily. Then, with a final salute, the blue square broke up, and with a whoop and a shout which sounded very much like 'Supper!' the girls sped away to their tents again, far too careful for their gowns and uniforms to wear them for the rough work of cooking or getting the camp into order, when they had come in very second-best tunics for that especial purpose.

Still Libby and Tib lay and watched, forgetful of their own supper-hour. They saw Miss Helen reappear presently, wearing a white blouse and short skirt, and begin giving directions to the girls who, Brownies once more, came hurrying out to get to work. Some carried water from the stream, some gathered firewood in the bushes immediately around the camps, some spread a tablecloth on the ground and began to carry out dishes and plates, while others brought piles of cushions and little mats, and laid them round the supper 'table;' evidently sitting on the ground late at night was not thought desirable in Camp Woody Dean.

One mat was laid beside the fire in Miss Helen's camp, and the gray cat, who had been sitting with his back turned to everybody during the ceremony, as if despising the whole business, now came and stretched himself upon it, purring contentedly in the warmth, and presently rolled over on his back and lay with his front-paws curled gracefully on his chest, so evidently asking to be tickled on the stomach that one after another of the busy Brownies bent to stroke him and ruffle up his fur and pull his ears.

By the camp fires cooking operations were going on, four girls being at work at each. With business-like erections of three poles, they hung kettles over their fires; it was evident this was not their first experience of camp cooking. Presently bacon, toasting on the ends of forks, began to splutter; the cat and the bulldog sat up and began to take an interest in life again; and the smell of the cooking reached the two envious watchers among the bushes.

'Ugh, I'm starving!' Tib declared. 'I'm going home for my own supper! If I don't, I shall have to go and steal some of theirs.'

'I'd like to see them have it,' Lib objected.

'They'll only eat like everybody else. If that firewood Brownie comes out again she'll find us. She came far too close last time. We'd better get along if we don't want to be caught.'

Lib, too, had watched the gatherer of wood apprehensively, and had been relieved when she turned back to the camp with her arms full. It was quite possible she would return; so, with many backward glances at the bustling brown workers, Lib followed her sister through the wood, slipping swiftly from bush to tree till they had reached the high-road safely.

'Mother won't be pleased. I'm sure we're late for supper,' Tib said anxiously, as they hurried along.

'I think she'll understand when she hears where we were,' said Libby.

But it was earlier than they had thought. Supper in Camp Woody Dean was early to-night, as all were hungry after their strenuous evening, and Libby and Tib reached home just as the gong sounded. Their talk during the meal was an excited jumble of tents and flags, Brownies and Indians, soldiers and beads, salutes and camp fires, and their father laughingly anticipated nightmares for them both, if, indeed, they slept at all. Mrs Mackenzie listened in amusement. All was going as she had wished, and she foresaw that the girls would have lost their objection to school long before it was time for them to go.

'I suppose you'll be up at five to-morrow morning?' their father teased. 'I wonder you can go to bed at all, Tibby! Don't you want to prowl round the camp in the dark?'

'I'd love to!—Will you come, Lib?'

'You'll prowl straight up to bed, both of you!' their mother assured them.

It was not five, certainly, when they crept out next morning, but it was hardly six. As Libby drew her curtains and leaned out of the open window to look across at the big green hill, the notes of a bugle came clearly down the valley—reveille sounded with very fair accuracy by Dorothy, standing beside the flagstaff in dressing-gown and slippers and tousled fair pigtail. Then she scurried back to her tent to dress, first giving a vigorous shake to sleepy Sammy in her corner.

'Samanthy! Sam! Wake up! We're in camp, and reveille's gone, you slacker! And you know you don't know your exports and imports for geog.! I thought you were going to swot them up before brekker?' she asked severely, as Sammy yawned and groaned and sat up, pushing back her short, heavy locks.

'Bother! So I was. But I'm camp orderly; I'll have to tidy up. The geog. will have to go, that's all.' Sammy was wide awake now, and dressing in frantic haste. 'Thanks be, I haven't got hair to plait, anyway. It's one blessing!'

'Yes, you're jolly lucky. I wish mum would let me have mine short,' Phyllis grumbled, struggling with a comb and a tangle.—'Do get out of the way, Cis! There's not room in a tent for four to dress at once.'

'Do your hair outside, then,' Cicely advised. 'Plenty of room there.—I say, Sam, I'll tidy up for you. There can't be much mess about yet.'

'Oh, can't there? Jennie and Madge were cooking last night, and they always leave paper and egg-shells about.'

'I'll see to it, anyway. You tackle those imports, or you'll get us all into a row. You know how partic. Bobs is the first few days we're in camp, for fear we'll slack. You sit in a corner and swot, like an angel—for our sakes, if not for your own, Samanthy.'

Sammy grumbled, but submitted, being fully aware of her ignorance on the subject of exports and imports. She retired to a corner with her geography-book, after a hurried visit to the 'bathroom,' a wide pool a little way down-stream, and 'swotted like an angel,' while Cicely, a quick dresser, carried out bedding to air, folded night-things, and put them out of sight. Then she went out to remove every scrap of litter from the camp, and Sammy was left in peace. Phyllis was brushing and plaiting her hair out in the sunshine, and Dorothy had taken her bugle and gone to practise her calls on the hillside.

‘Get a good way off, Dorothy!’ the cooks called after her from the fire they were re-building. ‘Anything under five miles is too close for bugle practice!’

‘I’ll take my bike,’ Dorothy laughed, and rode off up the valley, followed by shouts of ‘Don’t be late! Half-past seven, remember!’

Libby and Tib crept towards the camp with some thought of introducing themselves, but the extreme busyness of every one was too much for them. Everybody seemed to have her own task, and to be hard at work. Nobody appeared to have time to stand and talk. Fearful of being in the way, Libby would not thrust herself in among them, and Tib would not go alone. So they watched from a distance again, lying hidden behind a big elder-bush. They saw little parties go down to the bathing-pool, carrying towels; they saw others tidying up the camps, gathering wood, carrying water, tending the fires, spreading out blankets and mattresses to air, laying the breakfast-dishes on the ground, stirring porridge in big pans over the fires, and cutting plates of thick bread and butter. They saw the gray cat accept graciously a saucer of warm milk, and then, with a farewell flirt of his hind-foot, march away through the trees towards the road.

‘He must have friends he goes to visit in the village!’ Tibby laughed. ‘He seems to know his way about, doesn’t he?’

They saw Dorothy go off on her cycle, and wondered where she had gone, till presently weird sounds from the hill suggested her occupation; they saw Sammy come out from her tent and throw her book into the knapsack lying beside her staff before going to help Cicely to carry piles of porridge-plates; saw Rowena, in her tunic, but bareheaded, washing-up the supper-dishes, with Sybil and several other small girls helping her; saw Rose come in from a visit to the Chestnut Ring with arms full of branches of hawthorn, which she stuck into empty milk-cans and bottles to decorate the tables.

‘Hi, Killooleet! Renée! Romany! Take these over to the others with my love and best wishes for a happy Christmas, will you?’ she called, and several girls came to carry a generous share of the flowers across to the other camp.

‘With Nyoda’s—no, I mean Rose’s compliments!’ and Killooleet thrust her branches into Cicely’s hands.

‘Ow, thorns! Thanks awfully, Doris! Just what we were wanting!’

‘It’s almost half-past seven,’ Killooleet said severely. ‘Where’s your bugler? We want our porridge!’

‘Here she comes!’

Dorothy came pushing her cycle down the path. ‘Am I late? Just a sec. till I get my breath.’

Then a bugle-call rang out, and Libby and Tib watched in surprise as all the girls of both camps gathered round the flagstaff to salute the flag as it was slowly raised to the top of the pole by Vera. There was no ceremony this time, only a pause of a moment while the flag was hoisted, but all the girls stood reverently around, and all saluted as the flag was raised. Then they scattered to breakfast, and Libby and Tib went reluctantly home, with many a thought for the merry parties seated on the ground, porridge-plates on knees, tea-cups and bread and butter or marmalade on the ground beside them.

Later, from their windows, they watched the Brownies stream over the hill on their way back to school, most of them bareheaded, some carrying books, others gifts of hawthorn and hyacinths to decorate the classrooms. Some of them were singing as they went, and the wind, blowing as usual from the sea, brought the air and even snatches of the words to Libby as she leaned out of the window and watched them go:

'Learn the song and know the different parts,
All good work is divisible by hearts.'

And then, beginning again:

'Good-morrow, fair maid, good-morrow,
I greet you!
I hope in no mood for sorrow
I meet you!'

'What a catchy tune!' Tib slipped her arm round her sister's waist and listened. 'What's that? Something about washing dishes?'

'There are dishes to do, mending to do, cooking to do!
And something for you; yes, something for you, O plenty for you!'

Tibby laughed. 'I like that song! I'll make Sammy teach it to me.'

The same air greeted them when, late at night, they crept towards the camp. There was no thought of making friends to-night; it was far too late, for Mrs Mackenzie had taken the girls into town for a first visit, and they had agreed to leave the fascinating camp, expecting to be home by six. The town had proved more interesting than they had anticipated; there was much to see, and Mrs Mackenzie had shopping to do, so it was nearly eight before they returned to Woody Dean.

Their mother's motive in thus carrying them off for the day had not been wholly to give them pleasure. Tib's frankly expressed intention of visiting the camp in the absence of the Brownies had given her parents warning, and Mr Mackenzie had hastily claimed her services in the garden during the morning. At early lunch Mrs Mackenzie had proposed the visit to town, and had given the girls a word of warning.

'We have no objection to your making friends with the schoolgirls,' she explained. 'In fact, the sooner you do so the better. But you really must not expect to visit the camp while they are away, unless you have their leave to do so. They have trusted us, and are leaving their things in our care, knowing the wood is private property. You must keep away when the camp is empty. If you wish to be shown everything, you must ask them to take you round. To visit the tents would be like going into private bedrooms. Surely you see that for yourselves!'

'I didn't, quite,' Lib said penitently. 'But I do now. We won't, mother.'

'I don't see it!' Tib said frankly. 'They shouldn't leave anything about they don't want people to see. I don't believe they have done, either. All the tents are open and the sides turned up, for I ran down before lunch and had a look. It was all awfully tidy, mother! We couldn't do any harm by just walking round. Of course, we wouldn't look inside anything that was shut up!'

'I hope not, indeed. But it might have been too tempting, Tibby. Your safest way is to make friends with the girls. I am sure they will show you everything.'

'I want to see the uniforms again!'

'I want to see the Indian dresses and the beads!' said Lib.

'I wish we could meet Ribby and Perks, and tell them what a lot we've seen already!' Tibby laughed.

'Of course, there's the bulldog,' Libby added. 'I don't think I want to meet him unless there's some one there to defend me. Was he there when you went, Tibby?'

'He was sleeping at the foot of the flagstaff, as usual. But I don't think he's tied up. I'm not sure that I want to meet him either,' Tib acknowledged.

When they reached home shortly before sunset, they stole half-an-hour for a visit to the camp, not to speak to any one—there would not be time for that—but just to see what the girls

were doing. And the notes of the 'Work Song' met them, the words quite plain this time:

'Dishes to do, mending to do, cooking to do!
So shake off dull care, hide that look of despair,
And get busy, get busy, get busy!'

In the larger camp the girls had all changed into their blue uniforms, and, drawn up in two companies, were drilling smartly—one set under the command of Vera, the other of the mistress in blue. The words of command rang out sharply, and were sharply obeyed; the girls carried their staves, and wheeled to right or left and formed fours with precision and evident enjoyment.

The singing had come from the smaller camp, where the girls, wearing their old tunics and not their gowns, to Lib's disappointment, were sitting in groups under the trees, all at work in some way. Rose was doing delicate fancy-work; Sybil was laboriously practising the crochet she had learned in the holidays; Yallani had a curious little wooden loom on her knees as she leant back against a big sycamore-tree, and a bag at her side lay open, and showed bunches of tiny beads in rich colours; Rowena had a drawing-pad in her lap, and was working out a design; one or two girls had books, and seemed to be studying, but the greater number had managed to get through their preparation during the afternoon, and had left their books behind. As they worked, one after another would start a song, and the rest would join in. Sometimes it was the 'Work Song,' Rowena leading the sopranos, and Rose the altos:

'Learn the song and know the different parts,
All good work is divisible by hearts!
Rub a dub a dub!
All goes in one tub!
And everybody owes a rub!'

Or sometimes it was another ditty of which they all seemed fond:

'Better run away, better run away!
Pretty little maiden, run away!
When the woods are black as night,
That's the Boo-ga-man's delight;
Pretty little maiden, better run away!'

Sometimes it was an Old English folk-song, or an American coon-song. But presently, as Libby lay watching and listening, while Tib's eyes followed hungrily every movement of the drill, Rowena put down her drawing, stretched herself, and rose.

'"Burn, fire, burn!" I'm supposed to be watching the fire. Guess I'd better go and make it up, or the Guardian will be coming back and we shall keep her waiting for supper. I wonder how far they'll get.'

'Only ten miles, but it's enough for a beginning,' said Miss Helen's voice, and she came down the path, followed by a dozen girls. 'We can't start on too long tramps at first. Killooleet is quite fagged as it is.'

'Yes, I'm jolly tired!' and Killooleet dropped on the grass to rest.

'Oh, I say, fine plunder, Guardian! That's what I call good hunting,' cried Rose, as a girl came forward with her arms full of beautiful pink sainfoin. 'That will look bully on the tables to-night, Dawn! May I arrange it? Haven't we an empty jam-jar yet? Shall I spare some for the Guides, or shall we keep it all ourselves?'

'Oh, give them a little! Don't be greedy, Rainbow!' laughed the girl addressed as Dawn.

'I do love it, though.—Here, Syb! Tchikash! You take this and put it in water for the Guides. Leave it with Cicely; she's cook to-night.'

'What is it called?' asked Sybil, as she took the handsome pink spikes.

'Sainfoin, child. Haven't you seen it on the Downs? Put the name down when you come back.'

'That will make my twenty wild flowers!' said Sybil, in a tone of much satisfaction.

'Good for you, kid! You're working hard.—Come and get supper ready, Yallani! Cicely's putting their kettle on.—You and the others must rest, Guardian; Tanpa and Yallani and Watanopa and I will see to the supper, and Renée and Romany can help;' and Rose called up two smaller girls who had been lying under a tree. 'What have you two been doing all evening? Just wasting time?'

'Romany's been teaching me to tie knots. I can do five, Nyoda,' said Renée proudly.

'Well done, Queen!—Gipsy, you must be a good teacher.'

'The Queen wants some camping honours, and that's a good one to start with,' Romany laughed.

'Come on! Supper!' cried Rowena. 'Don't let's be late to-night.—Queen, you can lay the cloth.—Gipsy, bring the plates and knives.—Rainbow, won't you cut the bread? You've a good strong arm!'

'The Silver Birch Tree's hungry,' Rose laughed, and attacked the loaf.

'I don't want to be late. I've a plan for to-morrow morning, as I've told you already. You can do what you like, but I know what I'm going to do.'

'We'll help you!' said The Queen and The Gipsy together.

'We must go home!' Libby whispered. 'Tib, I'm sure it's after eight! Come along!'

'I'd like to drill!' Tibby said eagerly, as they went down the road together. 'D'you think we could join Sammy's lot, and have uniforms, if we go to the school?'

Lib looked at her with startled eyes. 'Wouldn't you rather be an Indian, and have a gown and beads? *I* would!'

'Oh *no*! I want to be like Sammy! Those girls in blue look so smart, and they're so quick!'

'That big girl, Rose, The Rainbow, called them the Guides; I don't know why.' Libby's voice was full of trouble. A dread she had never dreamt of had suddenly filled her heart.

'I wonder who they guide?' Tib laughed ungrammatically.

CHAPTER XIII.
GUIDES AND THE CAMP FIRE.

As they undressed an hour later Libby was very quiet, that new trouble filling her mind. Through the window on the evening breeze came the notes of Dorothy's 'Last Post,' a little shaky, certainly, but quite recognisable. Tib was full of delight over the military methods of the one camp, and a little scornful of the seemingly slacker ways of the other, but Lib did not argue the point. She was too deeply troubled, and the fact that Tibby saw nothing to be distressed about only added to her burden.

But what if they went to school, and Tib insisted on joining the Guides? Libby knew that every instinct within her was impelling her towards the Indian camp. Were they to drift apart entirely? She had never foreseen such a complete cleavage in their interests, and the thought was terribly disturbing to her. How could they remain one in heart, and yet be divided in all outward things? How could she allow anything to come between them? Rowena and Samanthy had done it, and yet seemed as fond of one another as sisters ought to be; but the possibility of that was new to Libby, and she hardly believed in it as yet. To her an outward separation implied a complete division. If they no longer 'did the same things,' how could they think together and be as much to one another as they always had been?

Then in her heart she admitted that already they were not 'thinking together.' The cleavage existed already, and she knew it. But she shrank from the thought of seeing it made plain to every one, as it would be if they joined different sets at school.

What if she became a Guide also, if they would have her? That, at least, would keep them together. But in every fibre of her being she was drawn towards Rowena, who had attracted her from the first; and the Indian gowns and names, the songs, and the leadership of Miss Helen, all combined in an almost irresistible force, impelling her towards the smaller camp. There was no doubt they would have to go to school sooner or later, and if membership in these school societies should then be open to them, they would have to make their choice. Must she become a Guide for Tibby's sake?

The question still lay heavily on her mind when she woke next morning, but she thrust it aside. After all, they knew very little yet about either the Guides or the others. There might be something which would make one of the two impossible, and then no decision would be necessary. Perhaps membership was limited, and there would be no vacancy for them. She was inclined to hope something of the kind would solve the question for her. In any case, the first step was to make friends, and their mother was urging them to do this, assuring them they would find an open friendship more satisfactory than the present state of affairs. Tib was eager to get on speaking terms also, and Libby herself was not unwilling, though not quite sure how to set about it.

'We can't walk into the camp and say, "It's us; we want to be friends"!' she had argued at supper-time.

'I hope you wouldn't use such bad grammar, anyway,' her mother laughed.

'Barring the grammar, I don't see why you shouldn't do something of the kind,' her father remarked.

'But they're all so busy, and there are so many of them, and they're all so—so satisfied with one another. They don't want outsiders.'

'Perhaps circumstances will help you out.'

Mr Mackenzie was right, and Libby found the question settled for her. Tib was always dressed first, 'because of Lib's hair,' she would explain, as if her own curls needed no

attention. She hung out of the window while Libby brushed her hair and tied her ribbon, and called exultant remarks to her about the beauty of the morning, the fresh salt smell of the air, the scent of the wallflowers, and the thrushes and blackbirds seeking breakfast on the lawn. When Lib was ready they put on their garden hats, for it was distinctly a 'Brownie day,' and set out through the garden towards the camp.

'I wonder what Rowena meant by saying she had a plan for this morning,' Tibby mused. 'What do you think she can be going to do?'

'I don't know. She does such lots of things. We'll see what she's doing when we get there.'

It was not much after six o'clock. Reveille had sounded just as Tib wakened. But four Brownies, at least, had dressed quickly, and were already at work. As Libby and Tib crossed the lawn at the far end from the house they heard voices, and turning a sudden corner round a big clump of white rhododendrons, they came on a most surprising sight.

A tall Brownie, in old brown tunic, and with no hat, but a mane of brightest chestnut hair, tied with a brown ribbon which made the hair look almost red, knelt beside a flower-bed, weeding energetically but carefully. A basket at her side showed that she had been working for some minutes already. Three younger girls were at work on the path near her—Sybil, and the two known as Renée and Romany, The Queen and The Gipsy. It was an especially weedy corner of the garden, which Mr Mackenzie had not yet tackled. He had, indeed, almost given up the thought of ever weeding that particular path, so thickly was it overgrown with grass and groundsel; but he had intended to try to do something to improve the bed as soon as the rest of the garden was in better order, for many young perennials were coming up in it, and were in danger of being choked by the weeds.

The four girls were working hard, kneeling on mats they had brought, for the morning dew was heavy. The three juniors were talking in low tones, Rowena humming as she worked. But at Tib's startled exclamation the younger girls, who were nearer to her, all looked up; then, with one accord, they looked at Rowena.

'Tanpa, here's somebody!'

Rowena paused in a tussle with a dandelion-root. At sight of the girls she laughed, and sat back on her heels for a rest.

'Good-morning! I hope you don't mind us trying to be useful? We really do know the difference between wallflowers and willow-herb, and delphiniums and buttercups, and antirrhinums and that other weed, even at this early stage! We're being very careful.'

'It's more than we do, then,' Tibby laughed. 'Which are antis, and which are delphies, and which are wallflowers? I'm not allowed to weed the borders, because I don't know any of them.'

'Oh, but you weren't to do weeding! Father said so,' Lib said swiftly. 'Please don't think you ought to, for nobody wants you to, really.'

'Somebody does, and that's ourselves. We'll feel better if we've done something useful. Yes, really, we want to do it,' Rowena said stoutly. 'And we think we ought to, and that matters still more. We've always done it every other year; we'd feel awfully mean if we didn't.'

'Frightful slackers!' Romany put in. 'We're going to take turns. Some of the Guides are coming to-morrow, and Nyoda and Killooleet and Watanopa and Dawn the day after.'

'Besides, it's our Law,' Rowena added. '"Give Service," you know, and "Glorify Work," and "Pursue Knowledge." I'm pursuing knowledge frightfully hard, learning different kinds of weeds. I've identified three new kinds this morning; ten will count as a Nature Honour. But you have to know how to "eradicate them," too, and I know only one way for them all, and that's dig them up as soon as they're big enough, and be sure you make a good job of it, and get the whole root out.'

‘But what does all that mean?’ Libby begged.

‘The Law? What’s the Law?’ Tib asked eagerly.

‘The Law we have to keep. I’ve told you three bits of it.—Sybil, you tell them another!’

Sybil coloured shyly, but smiled. ‘ “Be Happy,” ’ she quoted.

‘Queen, you’re breaking the Law this minute,’ Rowena cried peremptorily.

Renée looked startled, then laughed, and moved hastily on to her mat. ‘ “Hold on to Health.” You catch cold if you sit in the dew,’ she explained.

‘Romany, what’s the rest of the Law?’

‘ “Be Trustworthy.” “Seek Beauty.” We’re doing it, too. Even weeds are lovely when you look at them properly. Look at that!’ and she handed a sturdy plant of wood spurge to Libby. ‘It’s the duckiest thing when you look into it. And there’s the dinkiest little moss all over this path, almost like garden saxifrage. You’re quite sure you don’t want it? Weena’s sure it’s a weed, but it seems a shame to pull it all up.’

‘It would cover the path in no time,’ Rowena argued. ‘I’ve seen it at home. I learned the difference between young potatoes and black nightshade in the holidays, and I can tell you that wants some knowing. Your father wouldn’t love me if I rooted up all his potatoes and said they were nightshade, but they’re really awfully alike. I made our gardener teach me the weeds, in preparation for this job. Do you mind if we go on while we’re talking? I want to fill my basket before the breakfast-bugle goes.’

‘Won’t you stop, please?’ said Libby. ‘Father really doesn’t want you to do weeding.’

‘I came to weed, and I want to weed,’ Rowena said sturdily. ‘I’m sure he won’t mind when he sees what a clearance we’ve made.—Get on with your job, girls! We can talk just as well.’

‘Then we must help, that’s all! Is there room on your mat? I don’t want to wet my frock.’

Rowena glanced at the light-blue cotton frock and laughed. ‘It would show rather, wouldn’t it? Come on, then; heaps of room! Do you always wear blue? You’ve been wearing it every time I’ve seen you so far.’

‘Well, we can’t wear pink! Mother likes blue. Show me which are the weeds, please!’

‘It suits you awfully well, of course.’

‘Do you always wear brown?’ Tib retorted.

Rowena laughed. ‘We always come to camp in our very oldest tunics. It really doesn’t matter what happens to these. Some of them are hardly respectable, but they’re very comfortable, and good enough for the woods and Downs. Aurora’s is so short that she’s all legs; she’s grown so much in the winter. The girls all tease her, but Dawn doesn’t mind.’

‘Which is her name? Has she both?’

‘Oh, Aurora! We just call her Dawn, as we call Renée Queen and Romany Gipsy. Most of us have three names really; it must be rather confusing at first!’ Rowena laughed. ‘There go the Guides! Don’t you want to see them?’ as a bugle sounded in the road.

‘Where? Oh, are they marching?’ and Tibby was gone.

‘They’re off for a short route-march. Don’t you want to see them too?’

‘I’ll wait and help you,’ Lib said gravely. ‘Tib’s crazy about them. We saw them drilling last night, while you were sitting under the trees, singing. We’ve been watching you in the camp. Do you mind?’

Rowena laughed. ‘Not a bit! We thought perhaps you would. We knew you must be somewhere about. We were surprised we hadn’t seen you before. I was going to look for you soon, but we’ve been so busy getting settled.’

‘That’s why we didn’t come to speak to you; you all seemed so busy. And we were a bit shy,’ Lib confessed. ‘But we want to ask heaps of questions. Why are they called Guides?’

‘The Girl Guides, you know. The same for girls as the Scouts are for boys.’

‘Oh! And do they keep that Law too?’

'Theirs is different—just a little, but not so very much when you come to think about it. But I like ours best.'

'And you aren't Guides? What are you called, then?'

'Oh, we're the Camp Fire!' Rowena laughed.

'The Camp Fire?' Libby looked at her doubtfully. 'Is that your name? I know you have two camp fires; we saw you and the girl you call The Rainbow light them, after you'd put up the flag.'

'*Hoisted* the flag! And we didn't do that; it was the Guides' share. We kindled the Fire.'

'We saw their uniforms, and your lovely dresses. But what did you mean? You said, "We *are* the Camp Fire"!'

'We're Camp Fire Girls. It's an American idea. Our gowns and beads—everything—come from America. You can see how Indian it all is; we're Indian maidens meeting round the camp fire; fire stands for home, of course, and life and energy and purity—for everything good in life, almost! It's our central symbol. The Law is called The Law of the Fire.'

Libby had forgotten her weeding and sat fascinated. 'Tell me more! Are there any other Camp Fire Girls besides you?'

'Oh, heaps and heaps in America! Not so many in England yet, I think. But they had one at the school Miss Helen went to; one of the mistresses had lived in America, and she started it. She had some nieces in the school who had been Camp Fire Girls in the United States, and they helped her to get it going. Miss Helen belonged to it, and she started ours.'

'And you all have Indian names? I remember those you told me in the train, but we've heard others since. What does Yallani mean?'

'The Mountain. It means she'll try to be steadfast and not easily moved from what she thinks is right.'

'Oh!' Lib's eyes widened. 'I didn't know the names really *meant* anything in that way!'

'They're supposed to be our ideals,' Rowena said soberly, working hard as she talked. 'They don't need to be Indian. There's Romany; that means a gipsy. She's fond of outdoor life and hobbies. And Renée; a queen is one who does right and keeps other people right. Did you know that? "Regina" means that, at least; "Queen" is really one who *knows* and *can do* things. Renée uses both meanings.'

'And your name? And The Rainbow? And what does Killooleet mean?'

'Oh, the Killooleet is the singing sparrow of America! She's fond of music. Nyoda is always looking for sunshine after rain, the incurably happy kind of person. Miss Helen is Uda, The Firefly; that means doing sudden unexpected little kindnesses to people when they're feeling down and unhappy, like fireflies appearing suddenly in the dark. It suits her finely.'

'And your Silver Birch Tree?'

Rowena had purposely tried to avoid that. But she answered without shirking, though she always found the explanation hard to put into words. 'It means trying to keep yourself good and—and beautiful, inside, you know, and not letting the best part of you—your ideas, and thoughts, and intentions, and ideals—be crowded out of you by poorer things. It means keeping time for good things when others seem pressing on you. The idea is of a beautiful white birch in among other bigger and stronger trees, yet never crowded out of shape or crushed by them. I love silver birches, and I love my symbol and its meaning, though I know it's too good for me. But one can always try.'

'I love it too!' Libby drew a long breath. 'What beautiful ideas you have!'

'Oh, that's the Camp Fire! It's full of ideas and symbols. That's why I like it better than the Guides; it has more poetry and romance about it. But the Guides have some fine points about them too.'

'Tell me more!' Libby begged. 'When do you wear those lovely gowns?'

‘Only for ceremonial meetings. They’re very great occasions. We shouldn’t feel at all the same about our gowns if we wore them often. They’re like a priest’s robe, only put on for special times; not like a soldier’s uniform, for everyday use. You’ll see the Guides in uniform ten times for once you’ll see us in our gowns. But we love them all the more for that very reason. They’re very—very private kind of things to us!’

‘I like all you tell me about your Camp Fire!’ Lib said wistfully. ‘And I like the songs you sing. There’s one about washing dishes.’

‘Oh, that’s the “Work Song”! Yes, you would be sure to hear that. It’s fine to work to; we’re always at it. I say! To-night we’re having a big sing-song. Won’t you come along and listen? Ask your mother to let you come. But you must stay quite late; it’s more fun after dark. We’ll see you home!’

‘I’d just love it! And I know Tib would too.’

‘You must come to the camp, and then we can show you everything,’ Rowena said hospitably. ‘I’d like you to see my gown. It’s all trees.’

‘All *trees*? I’d love to come!’

‘We work our symbols on our gowns, you know. I have chains of dainty little birch-leaves hanging round the neck, and a big tree on the skirt.’

‘You put your names on your dresses? Oh, what a lovely idea!’

Rowena laughed. ‘Our gowns have to tell some story, or illustrate our names; they must be made interesting. Of course, the Guardian helps us. She’s Miss Helen, and she’s just—well, absolutely topping! You must come and see her.’

‘We have seen her. We talked to her in the village.’

‘Oh yes!’ Rowena said ruefully. ‘I remember now! She rowed us because we’d talked so much in the train before strangers. Oh, we didn’t mind!’ as Libby began to protest. ‘She was quite right. And we never mind Miss Helen’s rowing, but we do try not to do it again. She so seldom says anything that we know she means it when she does. Oh, you know her, then. She’s simply splendid. And she *is* the Camp Fire; she makes it. We’d never have had it without her, and we’d certainly never have been allowed to come camping. Bobs—her sister, Miss Robinson—would never have thought of it herself. But Miss Helen planned it all, and showed her how easily it could be done, and talked her round. She plans things for us, and thinks out names and symbols, and keeps us up to the mark in working for Fire-Maker and winning honours. The Camp Fire would fall to pieces without her.’

‘Oh, please stop a minute!’ Libby cried. ‘I’m just full of questions!’

Romany and Renée looked up from their weeding, and laughed.

Rowena joined in. ‘What about? Did I say anything very queer?’

‘Well, first about Miss Robinson. Is she very young? Or how does she manage to have a sister like Miss Helen? She looks as if she was only just grown-up.’

‘She’s twenty-three. But Bobs is forty, if she’s a day—forty-five, perhaps. They’re half-sisters really.’

‘I wondered how she could be old enough to be a head-mistress and yet have a sister so young! And why did she call you and The Rainbow Fire-Makers? And what are honours?’

‘Fire-Maker is the second rank in the Camp Fire. First you’re a Wood-Gatherer; last of all you can be a Torch-Bearer, if you’re good enough, but we haven’t any yet. You have to work and pass certain tests for each.’

‘Oh!’ Lib’s eyes were round again. ‘What a lot there is in it! And honours?’

‘Didn’t you see the beads we wore with our gowns?’

‘Yes, heaps of them! You and The Rainbow had a lot, and Miss Helen was all over them. Sybil hadn’t any.’

‘No, because she’s only just stopped being a Blue Bird—a little sister, you know; she’s only just twelve. The beads are our honours, and each stands for something we’ve done or learned. Each colour is a different subject. Brown is Camp Craft; yellow is Business; orange is Home Craft; green’s Hand Craft; blue is Nature; red is Health. And you have to work for them if you want to wear them. Purple is Fire-Maker. But there goes the bugle! We’ll have to fly. Will you come to sing-song?’

‘I’d simply love it, if mother says yes.’

The girls were hastily gathering up their mats and baskets. Rowena said eagerly, ‘Tell her we want you to have supper with us. Supper will be early, and then we’ll sit round the fire and sing. It’s Friday; no school to-morrow! To-morrow night—— But I’ll have to ask the Guardian about that first! But do come to supper to-night!’

‘With you or with the Guides?’ Libby asked, a sudden dread in her heart as she saw a mental picture of Tibby on one bank of the stream, and herself on the other. ‘I—think perhaps—we won’t be able to come,’ she faltered, wondering if it would not be wiser to say nothing of the invitation to Tib.

To Rowena her hesitation suggested sudden shyness. ‘We shall have one big party to-night. We’ve invited the Guides over into our camp, so we’ll all be together. But you needn’t be shy. I’ll look after you!’

Libby laughed, in sudden relief. ‘I’m not so shy as all that! We’d love to come. Thank you very much. I’ll go and ask mother this minute.’

‘Won’t you come back to camp with us now?’

‘Oh no! I’d rather wait and come with Tibby later. We always do everything together,’ Lib explained, a touch of sensitive colour in her face, as Rowena looked at her quickly. ‘Besides, you’ll be busy now. But we’ll come to-night, if we may.’

‘I wonder why she hesitated,’ Rowena pondered, as she followed Renée and Romany and Sybil through the wood.

CHAPTER XIV.
THE FIREWOOD FAIRIES.

For several minutes Libby sat alone on the path, thinking over it all—the names—the gowns—the honours—the ranks—the Law. There was so much in it that was new and fascinating to her. She was still going over all Rowena had said when Tib came running down the path and dropped beside her.

'Oh, Libby, you should have come! It's awfully fine! I know all about the Guides now!'

'Where have you been, Tibby?' Lib realised with a shock that she had completely forgotten her sister for nearly an hour.

'First I went after the Guides. They were marching beautifully, keeping step. I'd love to march too! I saw them pass at the corner, and then I followed them down to the village and saw them pass again. They were in two lots—patrols, they call them—eight girls in each, and each has a leader, besides Miss Fenton, who's over them all. They call her Madam.'

'She's the one in blue, I suppose?' Lib roused herself from dreams of Indian maidens singing round a camp fire, and began to be interested.

'She's awfully bossy. I think some of the girls are a bit afraid of her; I know I should be! But the patrol leaders are those two big girls who hoisted the flag, Vera and Ruth, and they have little flags on their staves with the crest of their patrol on them. One is the Heather Patrol, and their colours are purple and white; and the other is the Oak-Leaf, and their colours are green and brown. All the girls wear their colours on their shoulders—those bits of ribbon, you know.'

'But you couldn't find out all that just from seeing them pass, Tibby! You couldn't find out the names!'

Tibby laughed. 'No; I've been to the camp. I couldn't go following them round the roads, so I'——

'You've been to the camp? Without me? Oh, Tibby, that was mean!' Lib cried, in keen disappointment. 'Didn't you ever think it would be nicer to go together?'

Tib looked contrite. 'Well, no, I never did, Libby. I forgot everything, except that I wanted to know all about it. You don't mind really, do you?'

Libby stood with tightened lips, trying to be just. She was not so much angry as hurt. But even that was not fair. Had not she completely forgotten Tibby in her interest in Rowena's explanations? Had she thought of her once in all that time? Lib was honest, and she knew she had forgotten, though she knew, too, that she could never have gone to the camp without thinking of her sister.

Tib was eyeing her anxiously. 'You don't really mind, Libby?' she asked again.

'I'd have liked it better if we'd gone together for the first time, of course.' Lib struggled to speak naturally. 'But it doesn't matter, Tib. Tell me all about it! I've heaps to tell you too. But you tell first.'

Tibby slipped her hand through Lib's arm as they turned towards the house. Neither words nor signs of affection came easily to either of them; Lib was too reserved, and Tib at heart too boyish. But they understood one another, and Lib knew how much it meant that Tibby should take her arm and say penitently, 'I'm awfully sorry, old girl! I did forget, but it was all so—so jolly new and interesting!'

Libby laughed shakily. 'Yes, I know. We've never heard anything like it before. I didn't know we'd been lonely, Tib, but I guess we have. We've needed other girls. I'll tell you all about the Camp Fire presently, but you tell me first about the Guides.'

‘Their motto is, “Be Prepared,”’ Tib said eagerly. ‘They learn all kinds of things to be prepared for anything that may happen. And they have to be well and strong and clever, so as to be ready. They have to promise to be loyal to God and the King, to help other people always, and to obey the Law of the Guides. I can’t remember all the ten points of the Law yet, but a Guide has to obey orders, and be useful, and a friend to everybody, and her honour must be able to be trusted, and she must smile and sing!’

Libby nodded, remembering the seven points of the Law of the Fire. ‘Seek Beauty’ seemed to be the only one not covered by the Law of the Guides, and this first conclusion was only strengthened the more she came to know of both. ‘But who told you it all, Tib? Who have you been talking to?’

‘Well, you see, Sammy wasn’t out marching, nor several of the others we’ve seen, and I wondered where they could be, so I went to the camp to look for them. Sammy was the sentry, standing on guard outside the camp; she challenged me, and I said, “Friend!” and she said, “Pass, friend!” but she wouldn’t talk to me. She said it wasn’t the thing to talk to the sentry. She said they’d been wondering when they’d see us, but she couldn’t talk; so I went on, and found Phyllis and Cicely making the porridge, and they told me heaps. I helped them to set the table, and they showed me their badges. You know all that nonsense the boys told us about beads and “little, round, white circles”?’

‘Yes! I know about the beads. They win them by doing things.’

‘I know about the “circles.” They’re badges, and they have to work frightfully hard to get them. Sammy has four; she’s a Cyclist, and Laundress, and—oh, I forget the rest! They all have some. It was too bad of Ribby and Perks to make fun of it all.’

‘Yes, it was mean. The girls wouldn’t like it. Did you tell Sammy?’

‘Not yet, because I couldn’t talk to her. I didn’t want to tell any of the others. But I’m going to! I know she’ll be wild.’

‘I was sure Ribby was only teasing; though, of course, all he said was true enough. They’ve asked us to go for supper to-night, and afterwards they’re going to sing.’

‘Oh, goody! That will be ripping! I’ll have supper with the Guides; then I can talk to Sammy.’

‘They’re going to have it all together to-night, so you can’t,’ Lib said promptly, with secret relief.

‘I’ve got an idea, Libby! I thought of it while I was setting the table. When they’ve gone off to school, let’s go and gather heaps and heaps of wood for their fires, to give them a surprise! It would save them time at night; they’re always picking up sticks.’

‘We’ll be Wood-Gatherers!’ Libby laughed, with the Law—‘Give Service’—in her mind. ‘That’s a fine idea, Tib! We’ll leave them a huge pile.’

Mrs Mackenzie, much amused to hear of the weeding, raised no objection to the supper-party, only stipulating that the girls should wear their coats and should not sit on the bare ground.

‘They never do, mother,’ Libby assured her. ‘They’re frightfully particular about being careful. I suppose if one of them got ill they’d never be allowed to camp again. They have rugs and cushions and mats. And we may wait quite late, mayn’t we? It will be more fun after dark. Rowena said she’d come home with us.’

‘Oh, I’m sure they’ll provide a bodyguard—probably Guides with staves, ready to “present arms” at any moment, and perhaps the bulldog too,’ their father laughed.

‘Girls!’ Mrs Mackenzie called them back as they were setting out after tea, full of eager excitement. ‘Here’s a big tin of shortbread I brought from Edinburgh. I meant it for a special treat some day, to remind you of home, but if you care to offer it to the girls for supper’——

‘Oh, mother, what a lovely idea!’

‘Let me carry it!’ Tib pleaded. ‘Who shall we give it to, Lib?’

‘Miss Helen. The Camp Fire’s giving the party.’

‘It does sound funny!’ Tib laughed. ‘ “The Camp Fire’s giving the party!” Will they wear their uniforms and gowns, do you think?’

‘I don’t know. I hope so; but I’m not sure about the gowns. Rowena said they didn’t wear them often, and I thought, from the way she spoke, this wasn’t to be an important occasion, but just a jolly evening to enjoy themselves.’

Her estimate was right. There was nothing formal about the Sing-Song Supper. The Brownies wore their tunics, with crimson caps and jerseys, for the evening was cool, and every one was out to have a good time. Libby and Tib, a trifle shy, although to-night they were invited guests, stood for a moment among the trees, looking into the camp.

The Guides’ camp was deserted. ‘Madam,’ the Guide-Mistress, had offered that her girls should help to prepare the supper, but the offer had been politely but firmly declined. The Camp Fire Girls were quite able to entertain their own guests. So the Guides had retired to the Chestnut Ring, and were practising First Aid on one another, not even leaving a sentry in camp except the big bulldog, lying, as usual, at the foot of the flagstaff.

There were not many girls to be seen in the other camp, either. Yallani and Killooleet were washing-up the tea-dishes, with big basins of hot water placed on empty boxes outside the kitchen tent, and Renée and Romany were drying for them. Nyoda was sweeping the camp with a broom made of twigs, and Tchikash was gathering every fallen bit of twig or piece of waste-paper. On a table formed of another upturned box the elder girl called Watanopa was mixing scones in a basin, to be cooked on a griddle over the fire; and another was squeezing the juice out of a pile of lemons for home-made lemonade.

Rowena was making up the fire with small logs. At sight of Libby and Tib hesitating among the trees, she came to meet them. ‘Are you the good fairies who have stacked up all this firewood for us? We thought so. Miss Helen calls you the Firewood Fairies. It was awfully jolly of you; the girls are all calling down blessings on your heads.’

‘Where are they?’ Tib asked. ‘It’s all awfully quiet.’

‘It’s not usually quiet, is it?’ Rowena laughed. ‘I’m afraid we’re rather a noisy lot! The Guides are up on the parade-ground among the chestnut-trees, practising ambulance-work. They call it the parade-ground; we call it the Place of the Council Fire, because we have our meetings there.’

‘Your name is prettier than theirs, as usual,’ Libby observed.

‘But, as usual, theirs is more practical! Miss Helen and a lot of our girls have gone foraging for extra rations for supper, because you were coming. Oh, don’t apologise! We shall all reap the benefit! We couldn’t give visitors only bread-and-butter and cocoa. We’re supposed to live on the very simplest food in camp, but we like to have extra when we give a party. And we like to give a party now and then, so that we can have extra! They’re trying to walk forty miles in ten days—Health Craft Honours, you know! I did it in the holidays, so I’m not troubling about it again just yet. I’m as keen on walking and exercise as any of them, but some one has to be about the camp, and I thought some of the others ought to get chances of going on the Downs. I have them all the holidays.’

Lib shyly offered the box of shortbread. ‘We thought you might like it for a change.’

Rowena thanked her warmly. ‘We never eat cakes in camp; but as it’s a present, perhaps the Guardian will let us break the rule for once. It’s just awfully kind of you. Now come and be introduced. You know The Rainbow, don’t you?’

Rose paused in her sweeping to nod a laughing welcome. ‘You stared at us in the train! Glad you’ve come along!’

'You'll be gladder still when you hear what's in this box!' Rowena teased. 'Here are The Mountain and The Sparrow washing-up; you know The Queen and The Gipsy already.'

'Your names are funny!' Tibby began to laugh.

'This is Watanopa, The Adventurous One. Her scones are really topping, so she always has to make them for special occasions.'

'My name means "To embark,"' Watanopa laughed, in answer to Libby's questioning look. 'I love going in for new things and having adventures.'

'And I'm Lexse, the Clover-Leaf,' her companion added. 'My three leaves are Work and Health and Love.'

'That's the whole Law put into one word, you know,' Rowena explained. 'Our password, Wohelo—Work, Health, Love—the three ideals of the Camp Fire. Now come into my tent and I'll show you things, if you'd care to see them?'

'If we'd care to!' Tib echoed. 'Don't you know we're just bursting with longing to go into one of your tents?'

'I rather thought you were! You haven't been in while we've been in school, then?'

'No, we didn't come into the camp.' Lib was thankful she could say it.

'Mother wouldn't let us,' Tib added ingenuously. 'And we were afraid of the dog, too.'

Rowena laughed. 'I'm sure you wanted to come! Great Britain wouldn't have hurt you; he never hurts a girl; but I'd be sorry for any one else who'——

'Great Britain?' they laughed.

'John Bull, if you like that better. He answers to either.'

'And the gray cat? Can't we see him?' Tibby asked eagerly. 'What's his name? Oh, is he out for a walk? We've met him going for walks!'

'Then you know the funny determined look on his little gray face! It's no use trying to stop him. He knows where he's going, and he's made up his mind about it. He's out now, and has been for hours.'

'Doesn't he ever get lost? Do you know where he goes?'

'Partly. He pays a round of visits in the village. I know he calls on our cat at home, and they know him quite well at the vicarage; everybody knows Grey Edward!'

'Oh, is that his name?' laughed Libby. 'He is very gray, of course; but why Edward?'

'We got him about the time the war began, and as he was so very gray, as you say, we called him after Sir Edward Grey, because everybody was talking about him then. But now he's more often called Grey Edward; it sounds more friendly, and he doesn't really behave well enough to be Sir! He isn't at all domesticated; he simply won't stay in the house or the camp. He's just Kipling's "Cat That Walked" come to life.'

'Isn't he fond of you all, then?'

'Oh, tremendously! He's frightfully loving when he is at home, and purrs like anything when you speak to him. He's very polite, too; he never lets you speak to him or touch him without saying, "Thank you," even if he's half-asleep and can only screw out the tiniest bit of a purr; he always says *something*! Of course, he purrs more when he sees you getting the dinner ready! He's our mascot, and Great Britain is the Guides'. But now come and see my tent.'

There was not very much to see at first glance. The tent was very neat, of course; there was no room to be anything else. There were four narrow beds, of mattresses, pillows, and blankets; small suit-cases or knapsacks beside the beds held each girl's belongings; each had a strong canvas bag with several pockets to hold toilet necessaries, brush and comb, pins, sewing materials, &c., and these were laid on their beds during the day, together with extra clothing, all neatly folded. From the central pole hung mackintoshes, spare skirts and dressing-gowns, and four Indian gowns of yellow khaki trimmed with brown leather fringe.

‘Sit down on my bed,’ Rowena suggested. ‘Now this is my gown!’ and she spread it out for them to see.

Even Tibby cried out in admiration; Lib’s delight made her speechless. The gown was decorated with hand-embroidered birch-leaves, dainty little triangles of green and gold—‘For autumn,’ Rowena explained. They hung from a narrow white branching twig which encircled the neck, in threes and sevens, in long dangling chains—‘Seven for the Law and three for Wohelo,’ the owner added. The same green and gold leaves were twined in a wide design round the loose short sleeves, and a graceful silver birch rose from the hem of the gown, its white branches drooping under their weight of delicate green leaflets. On each side of it were forest trees, wide and spreading, thick-stemmed, with heavy dark foliage—the trees of the wood which did not manage to crush ‘Tanpa’ out of her place.

‘It’s lovely!’ Libby breathed. ‘Did you do it all yourself?’

‘I’m rather keen on designing. Here’s my head-band. Have you seen our little looms? You’d like to make a band; everybody does;’ and Tanpa showed a green, white, and gold band of tiny beads.

‘I can’t think how you do it!’ Libby said wistfully.

‘I felt entitled to the gold, for, after all, a birch is as typically beautiful in autumn as in summer. They turn such a lovely colour, don’t they?’ Rowena took a leather bag from the pole. ‘Here are my honours!’ and she showed a long chain of coloured beads of varying shapes. ‘They’re quite worth working for, aren’t they? We’re all very keen on them. This is my Wood-Gatherer’s ring, and here’s my Fire-Maker’s bracelet. Miss Helen sends to America for them for us.’

‘May we see the other dresses too?’

‘I can show you those, but not their honour beads. They’re put away carefully. This is Renée’s gown; see her golden crowns! They didn’t show very well on the yellow, so she worked them on this band of royal purple. I helped her to make this design of crowns and orbs and sceptres. Here’s Romany’s; her symbol is two tents and the camp fire, but she’s worked all kinds of outdoor life into her gown. See the flowers round the sleeves—all wayside wild flowers, stitchwort, and violets, and daisies, and buttercups—can you recognise them all? Round the neck are leaves and berries—ivy, and bryony, and convolvulus, and clematis, and blackberry; those are the hedges along the road! She’s rather short, you know, so she continued her trails of leaves right down the front; it makes her look taller. Here at the bottom are trees, and those wavy lines are streams, and that white band is the road winding among the trees, and here and there you’ll find a tiny caravan or a group of tents and a camp fire.’

‘It’s simply lovely—nearly as pretty as yours!’

‘Oh, I don’t claim that mine’s anything wonderful! Nyoda’s rainbow gown is very jolly, and the Guardian has all our symbols round her hem, and our rank and honours worked above. This other gown belongs to a girl called Opechee, The Robin. But listen!’

Through the woods came a long hail, ‘Wohelo! Wohelo!’ and then the sound of singing.

‘That’s the “Walking Song.” They’re coming back.’ Rowena hastily hung up the gowns again. ‘Libby and Tib, we’re going to do you a great honour. I asked the Guardian, and she gave me leave to invite you to watch our ceremonial meeting to-morrow night. We don’t often have visitors, but we always allow the Guides to watch the meeting while we’re in camp. If you care to come, you’ll see everything then.’

‘Oh, you are awfully kind! We’ll simply love it!’ The girls spoke together. ‘Where is the meeting held? Here?’

‘No; in the Place of the Council Fire, up among the chestnuts and hawthorns. Come at seven o’clock, sharp. Then you’ll see all our gowns, and the lighting of the Fire, and everything. Now come out and see the others!’

With a last triumphant cheer the foraging-party entered the camp, and Libby and Tib, with radiant faces, followed Rowena out to meet them.

CHAPTER XV.
THE SING-SONG SUPPER.

Miss Helen put down a basket and turned to greet them warmly. 'Tanpa, those are eggs. Will you see to them? We had difficulty in getting enough. Opechee and Aurora have some more.—Shuinala and Psuti, put down those apples! Your arms must be nearly broken.—Well, Firewood Fairies, how do you like our camp? Has Tanpa shown you round? You are our good fairies, I suppose?'

'It was Tibby's idea,' Lib said honestly. 'We liked gathering it for you.'

'It was a very kind idea. But we can talk during supper.—Girls, you have just a quarter of an hour!'

The walking-party scattered to change their shoes and wash. Romany began to build the apples in carefully planned pyramids on the tablecloth. Rose took an armful of white campion from a small girl who answered to the name of Tumaga, The Bee, and began to arrange it among her pink sainfoin. Another who had been out with the foraging-party, Tamakwa, The Beaver, brought long trails of bryony gathered by the way, and The Rainbow twined these artistically among the dishes and the apples.

The Silver Birch Tree was beating up eggs for omelettes, standing outside the kitchen tent, and Libby went to watch her. Tib wandered off to the other camp, drawn by the sound of a bugle in the distance. It announced the return of the Guides, and presently they marched into the camp, triumphantly carrying two stretchers, on which lay Samanthy and Cicely, with broken legs and ribs most scientifically bandaged. Those girls of the Camp Fire who were not working went across to inspect, and amid cheers and laughter the wounded ones were helped to their feet and the bandages unwrapped.

Soon a little tinkling bell called them across the stream to supper. Dorothy had offered to sound the 'Cookhouse Door' on her bugle, but the Camp Fire preferred to avoid the military atmosphere altogether, and found Miss Helen's little silver bell more to their liking. The big Union-Jack was lowered for the night, all the Guides standing at the salute as usual. Then, with Tibby in their midst, they ran in procession across the plank, or, using their staves, jumped the stream, and were led to their places by their hostesses.

Miss Helen took one end of the tablecloth, and the Guide-Mistress the other. Tib wriggled in between Samanthy and Dorothy; Libby found Rowena keeping a place for her beside herself, to her great gratitude. Tamakwa, The Beaver, was the last to come to her place, and Grey Edward was purring in her arms, his bright eyes eager as he scanned the table. The rest of the Camp Fire greeted their mascot with a shout, and The Beaver explained, 'I heard his bell among the bushes. He's come home for some of The Adventurer's scones. He says he knew there would be scones to-night; he knew we had visitors.'

'He's just crazy for Watanopa's scones!' Rowena laughed to Libby. 'We can hardly get any ourselves when Grey Edward's on the job. I have known him steal them, though he doesn't often steal.'

'Does he catch birds? Is that why he wears a bell?'

'Partly. It's useful to tell us where he is, too. But he is a murderer when he gets the chance. I'm afraid he has rather a good time while we're in camp. The Beaver is his special chum, and she's quite silly about him. She talks to him, and tells us what he says to her about everything. She has a special squeaky voice that she keeps for Edward; she always uses it when she speaks to him, and he knows in a minute. She gives him anything he wants, even if it means going without herself. Do you know, last night I heard a sound, so I crept to the door of my

tent and looked out. I thought I'd heard Grey Edward's bell; he'd been out when we went to bed, so he hadn't had any supper—at least, not from us. We don't know what his other friends give him. And there were Tamakwa and Tumaga making up the fire without making a sound about it, and warming Grey Edward's milk in a saucepan, because he'd told The Beaver he preferred his supper warm! They were in their night-things, with only skirts and jerseys slipped on top. And he was sitting there beside them, purring loudly enough to wake the camp, almost, and looking awfully pleased with himself, of course. Then they took him off to bed, and I suppose he slept between them.'

Libby laughed, and watched Edward daintily but rather greedily accepting bits of scone from The Beaver's fingers. 'He is beautifully marked, isn't he? And such splendid whiskers!'

'Oh, he's very beautiful! Unfortunately, he thinks so himself. You can see his opinion of himself written all over him. He knows he's quite the most beautiful cat in the village.'

'He isn't!' Opechee, The Robin, leaned forward suddenly and interrupted. 'He isn't even pretty! He's quite *ugly*! He's not a bit nice-looking!'

Libby looked startled, but Rowena only laughed. 'The Robin thinks it's her duty to try to take down his conceit. She's always telling him how ugly he is. But Edward knows just how much to believe of all that!'

'*Very* ugly, and *very* conceited, and as silly as any cat could be!' The Robin said promptly. 'And I just hope he's listening, that's all!'

'He isn't!' Tamakwa laughed. 'He's only thinking about scones!'

'And *very* greedy, and a murderer, and a thief, and a dreadful stopper-out-at-nights!' Opechee finished, and tossed a bit of scone across the table to the culprit.

Supper was unusually festive that night, as was evident from the exclamations of the Guides as they surveyed the table. Rowena's omelettes—'Home Craft Honours! Cook eggs in four ways!' she whispered to Libby; Watanopa's scones, hot from the griddle; big dishes of junket and milk; apples and oranges for dessert, were all additions to the ordinary menu, and were keenly appreciated; while the box of shortbread was greeted with a cheer. Guides and Camp Fire Girls chattered like veritable robins throughout the meal, and Tib Mackenzie soon lost her shyness and plied Sammy with questions. Lib was no slower in making friends, but it took her more time to feel quite at home. She did not talk much, but enjoyed intensely the feeling of being one of the merry crew at last. 'It's so nice to be here, with you all, instead of hiding out there among the trees!' she murmured to Rowena, under cover of a shout of laughter as Grey Edward put up a little hand and grabbed The Beaver's scone neatly just as it was disappearing into her mouth. 'We felt such outsiders; now we're really in everything!'

Rowena nodded. 'Not quite, though. You can't really be in things unless you belong to the school. Till then you're only visitors. Better come soon!'

'I rather think I'd like to!' Lib said thoughtfully.

When the cocoa and lemonade, omelettes and junket, scones and shortbread had vanished, the dishes were collected and carried off out of the way, and the girls attacked the piles of apples, which Romany had polished till they shone. Miss Helen declined any fruit, and sent Tumaga to fetch her guitar from her tent.

She began to play an air, and the girls took up the tune, 'Three Gipsies stood at the Castle Gate.' The Camp Fire sang the 'Boating Song,' and the Guides responded with their march, 'Be Prepared, True Guides of Britain!' Then all joined in 'Loch Lomond' and 'Robin Adair,' to the delight of the visitors; and later, after some coon-songs, came 'Ye Banks and Braes' and 'Speed, Bonny Boat.'

'Out of compliment to our guests!' Miss Helen laughed, as she began to play.

Libby, singing with the rest, wondered if her parents were listening, and thought it likely. But suddenly she awoke to the fact that Rowena was no longer at her side. She looked about

for her in the gathering dusk, and discovered that Rose and Yallani had disappeared also. Presently they returned from the direction of their fire, each bringing a lighted candle in a wide, steady holder.

'Candle-time?' said the Guardian. 'So it is! I can hardly see Sammy and Tib over there! Thank you, Tanpa!'

A sudden hush fell on the company, which Libby did not understand, not knowing the symbolism of the candles to the Camp Fire Girls. The Guides knew and respected it, however; they knew that their 'Indian' sisters could not light a candle unthinkingly. A murmur of delight and admiration broke from the visitors as Rowena came through the crowd and knelt beside the tablecloth and reached over to place her candle in the middle, for she had slipped her ceremonial gown over her tunic, and had taken time to part and plait her hair and to put on her head-band. Her long chain of honour beads jingled as she moved, and the candle-light twinkled on her silver ring and bracelet and the glittering golden beads on her forehead. The Rainbow and The Mountain, wearing their gowns and beads also, placed their candles so that the three formed a triangle, and then, at a note from the guitar, all their companions began to sing:

'Burn, fire, burn! Burn, flicker, flame!
Whose hand above this blaze is lifted
Shall be with magic touch engifted,
To warm the hearts of lonely mortals
Who stand without their open portals.'

'What a lovely poem!' Libby whispered to Renée, who sat on her other side.

'We always use it when we light a fire, or candles,' The Queen replied. 'The candles are for Wohelo, you know; and so is the triangle—Work and Health and Love.'

'Now a story, Miss Helen!' pleaded Opechee. 'You've got one for us, haven't you?'

Tanpa, Nyoda, and Yallani slipped into their places again, and Lib sat fingering the vivid orange, green, and red beads, while the Guardian told the old Icelandic tale of Gudrun and her many lovers. It was a tragic story, but the romance of it appealed to the girls, and they enjoyed it, while sympathising with the heroine and her many misfortunes.

After the tale the singing continued by candle-light, but Rowena and her two friends slipped away to change their dresses again. While Libby was still wondering why they had not waited till bed-time, which could not be far off now, a little sound over by the stream told her what they were doing. No one else seemed to have heard it; she crept unnoticed out of the circle, and made her way through the darkness to join them.

'You're washing-up! There must be a lot to do after such a big party! Do let me help!' she begged. 'I'll dry very carefully!'

'No fear! You're a visitor!' Rowena was busy with a big basin of hot water.

'Go and sit down and listen to the singing!' Rose said sternly.

'No; I want to help. I can hear just as well from here. You can tell me what the songs are.' Libby took the tea-cloth out of The Mountain's hands. 'You get some more hot water, and let The Rainbow dry for you, and I'll dry for Rowena.'

They laughed, but agreed to the rearrangement; and Libby added, 'I wondered why you bothered to take off your gowns so late. But of course you couldn't wash-up in the lovely things!'

'Rather not! We've used more plates than usual to-night, you see; we shouldn't have had enough for breakfast. We didn't think you'd miss us.'

'Was it just for Tibby and me you put on your gowns—because we wanted to see them?'

‘Partly. Partly it was out of respect to the candles,’ Rowena said gravely. ‘Just as the Guides wear their uniforms when they hoist the flag the first time. Wait till you’ve seen a meeting and heard the candle verses, and you’ll understand.’

‘I can see the moon through the trees,’ Nyoda announced. ‘Isn’t it jolly of it to be full for our week in the woods?’

‘I believe Miss Helen times the camp so on purpose. She thinks of everything. Presently somebody over there will see it, and then we shall have “Mammy Moon.” ’

‘There!’ said The Rainbow, at a particular chord from the guitar.

‘This is a very special camp song, only for moonlight and the camp fire,’ Rowena explained swiftly, as the song rose from the girls sitting round the candles.

‘De day is past en gone, en what is done am done;
Ef yo’ ain’ done yo’ bes’ you’ll be de suffrin’ one.’

‘Oh, what a pretty tune!’ Libby breathed. ‘And how beautifully they sing it!’

‘It is rather pretty, coming out of the dark like that! We keep it for moonlight sing-songs, as a rule.’

‘De onlies’ thing ez I kin see dat yo’ kin do,
Is go ter bed en sleep en res’ de whole night through;
Ole Mammy Moon’ll watch de camp, so yo’ kin res’,
En git up in de mo’nin’ fit ter do yo’ bes’.
Oh Moon, oh Mammy Moon!
Please keep watch until de mo’nin’ light!’

‘Ask them to sing it again, won’t you?’ Libby begged.

‘I guess they will, anyway. That’s the end of the dishes, thanks to your help; so we’ll go back—no, they’re coming here. I expect they want the fire. It’s getting chilly.’

Miss Helen carried one candle, and her two youngest members, Tchikash and Tumaga, the others. They were set down in a triangle about the camp fire, and the big circle was formed again.

‘Thank you, Fire-Makers!’ said the Guardian, as Rowena and Rose made up the fire. ‘We wondered what you were up to. Don’t think we didn’t miss you!’

Libby whispered to Romany, who exclaimed, ‘They’ve been washing-up!—You are bricks, you know! We shall all bless you in the morning.’

‘The Firewood Fairy helped us,’ Rowena laughed. ‘May we have “Mammy Moon” again, Guardian?’

For half-an-hour they sang round the camp fire. Then all stood while the Camp Fire Girls sang ‘Lay Me to Sleep in Sheltering Flame,’ and the little good-night song, ‘Beneath the Quiet Sentinel Stars;’ and the Guides, standing at attention, led them all in the National Anthem. The younger girls were ordered off to bed by their leaders, and a bodyguard, consisting of the elders of both camps, conducted Libby and Tib by the light of bicycle-lamps out to the road and as far as their own front-door. With cries of ‘Good-night!’ they hurried away, and Lib and Tib went to bed humming the chorus:

‘Please keep watch, Mammy Moon!
De fire’s gwine out pretty soon!
Please watch away till anudder day,
Good ole Mammy Moon!’

CHAPTER XVI.
UPS AND DOWNS.

'Isn't this pretty?' Libby greeted Rowena in the morning, an oak-branch in her hand.

She had taken the Law of the Fire to heart, and repeated its clauses night and morning. As soon as bad weather forced her to stay indoors—though it would have to be really bad before she gave in—she intended to print the Law on a card and illuminate it, and hang it over her bed. Of its precepts, 'Seek Beauty,' 'Give Service,' and 'Pursue Knowledge' seemed the easiest to begin upon, and she was prepared to act on any or all of them. At times she felt there was no need to urge her to 'Be Happy,' since in her new friendship with so many girls and this new, strange interest of the Camp Fire she was finding so much to make her so. Then she would remember that Tibby was finding her happiness among the Guides, and with that cloud upon her Libby felt she could not possibly be happy at all.

'I never knew oak-trees had flowers before,' she added, holding out the branch with its drooping green tassels. 'I suppose I never looked. But the sycamore flowers are so lovely that I began looking for the flowers on other trees too. Of course, they're green, but they are pretty! The oak-tree on our lawn is just a sight, with these little dangling green strings all over it!'

'Yes; and have you seen the seeds on the wych-elms? I'll show you, then. They're another fine sight in May. The ground is green underneath them.'

'Oh, little, round, green seeds, like confetti? I saw them, but I didn't know what they were. There's one outside our gate, and the road's just like a green carpet under it. We are looking forward to the meeting to-night!'

Tanpa laughed. 'I've an idea the Guardian has some kind of surprise for us. She often has. She hasn't said so, but I guessed it from her face.'

'Why do you call it a ceremonial? It's a queer word.'

'Because it's all ceremonies. You'll see to-night. Did you meet the Guides? They're weeding your back-path—heaps of them.'

'Father laughed when he heard you really had been weeding. He was going to stop you, but I said I thought you really did want to do it.'

'Of course we do. We feel better if we're doing something for our living.'

'He said you'd made a great improvement yesterday. What are you going to do to-day? There's no school, is there?'

'No. To-day and to-morrow we have real days in the woods, except for church to-morrow morning. Bobs—Miss Robinson, you know!—likes us to go to church, all but those who are getting the dinner ready; so we go to school to dress, and go to service in the chapel with the others. Then we put on our old tunics again, and come back here to dinner and washing-up! We're always washing-up in camp, but nobody minds; it's part of the fun. I'm going to peel potatoes now, to save time after breakfast. We want to go out on the Downs, but there's a lot to do in camp on Saturdays.'

'I'd like to help. I can peel potatoes, really.'

'Oh, all right!' Rowena laughed, and provided her with a cooking-apron, a knife, and a pail. 'Put your skins in there; we must keep the camp tidy, or we'll have The Sparrow after us. She's tidying-up to-day.'

'Don't you call it camp orderly? Tib said somebody was camp orderly yesterday.'

'That's in the Guides. We don't have orderlies. It doesn't seem worth while for a week. If we were camping for a month, we'd divide the work properly and each take our turns, but as it

is we just have volunteers. I like it better. Of course, there's always a rush for the clean jobs, and the last to offer has to clean the pans! But I'd rather even clean pans because I'd offered to do it than just because it was my turn, or because some one had told me to do it! We know we've all got to do something. Nobody comes here to slack. The slackers don't join Camp Fires. They stop in school and have their meals put in front of them, and the dishes washed-up for them afterwards, while they read library books!'

Lib nodded. 'But the Guides are different?'

'Oh, quite! Everything over there has to be done just on the tick, like in barracks, you know. They have sentries who present arms whenever Madam goes near them, and they all salute when they speak to one another, and everything is done by orders and has to go like clockwork. They have orderlies for everything, and change them every day, so that every one gets a little of everything even in a week. I never know what Sammy is. One minute she's sentry, and next she's cook, and then she's camp orderly, and then she's a scout. I should never know where I was, but she loves it.'

'I should get all muddled up,' Lib said seriously.

'Of course, we're only playing at camping, really,' Rowena confessed, dropping a potato into the pan of water at her side. 'We have to go to school every day for classes and preparation, and that means we have a good dinner in between. So, if anything does go wrong with our camp cooking—if Tamakwa burns the porridge, as she did yesterday, or if Opechee can't get any sugar when she's sent to the village for errands—we can get along on bread-and-butter till dinner-time! It's only at week-ends we really have a chance to live on our own cooking. We'd heaps rather do it all the time, of course. We've begged Bobs to give us only bread-and-butter at one o'clock, and let us cook an evening dinner for ourselves; but she won't hear of it. But last year we stayed on for a week's camping after the end of the term, and that was more like the real thing. Where is Tibby this morning?'

Libby's face clouded. 'Over with the Guides.'

'Why don't you like her being there?'

'I never said I didn't,' Lib said hastily.

'Oh yes, you did! You looked it.'

'I don't mind, of course. Why should I? Tell me some more about the school! Mother wants us to go next term.'

Rowena allowed the subject to be changed, but made a mental note of the unanswered question. 'Couldn't you come at half-term? Then, if we have another camp in July, you could come, if you'd joined the Camp Fire and Tibby the Guides. Any one can see you'll want to.'

'Oh, would you have us? I thought perhaps you only took a certain number, and we'd have to wait till there was room.'

'I think we could squeeze you in. There are always girls leaving in the summer. We are very strict about numbers, but neither we nor the Guides are quite full strength at present.'

'I think I'd like to come soon,' Lib said wistfully. 'I'll talk to mother about it. But would we have to wear red caps and coats?' and she began to laugh. 'We were talking about it last night. Wouldn't we look awful in red? What do you do when you have red-haired girls? Or don't you have any?'

Rowena laughed too. 'We won't refuse you on that account! Oh, don't worry! It's not scarlet nor pink, you know. That deep red won't matter; it will make your hair look more golden, that's all, just as a brown tunic turns mine red, which it isn't at all.'

'There's a lot of red in it, then,' Lib retorted, glancing at the long chestnut tail which hung over her friend's shoulder as she worked.

'The girls call Samanthy and me "Chestnuts." It's better than "Carrots," anyway. The boys at home can't call names, for they're just the same.'

'The boys!' Libby began eagerly. Then she checked herself and looked thoughtful.

Rowena looked up quickly. 'You know Ribby and Perks, don't you? It was because of Ribby that I said your names seemed too good to be true. How did you make friends?'

'Tib rolled down the hill and knocked Ribby off his bike. They weren't hurt, but they had to say something after that.'

Rowena laughed. 'I expect Ribs had something to say about it, hadn't he?'

'They both said things, and so did Tib. We've met them two or three times.'

'They call us the Ups and Downs.'

'Ups and Downs? They call you other things besides that!' said Libby.

'Oh, Robins and Brownies, of course! Everybody does that. But Ups and Downs is Ribby's own invention.'

'What does it mean? You are fond of making up names in your house!'

'We are, rather. Well, the school is *up* on the *Downs*, to begin with, isn't it?'

Libby laughed and agreed. 'What else?'

'Of course, we have our ups and downs, like every one else. The boys say that when we go home for week-ends we're either up in the clouds about things, or down in the dumps. I suppose it's true, but you could say it of anybody. But the real reason is the Camp Fire and the Guides. The boys know a good deal about them, and they think they know a lot more than they do. But they have heard a good deal. They call the Guides the "Ups," and us the "Downs"!'

'But why? I don't see that at all!'

'There's something in it,' Rowena acknowledged. 'If you think of a Guide, you imagine her standing up, saluting or standing at attention or drilling, always doing something active. Their motto, "Be Prepared," means being up and ready for anything that comes along. They do study for badges, and sew, and cook, and draw, just as we do; but you don't think of them as doing it. That's all more behind the scenes with them; the things you see are the drilling and marching, doing things for people, going messages, and so on.'

'Yes, I see that. But why are you the "Downs"? I don't like that!'

'I argued a lot about it at first, but Ribs stuck to it that he was right. And after all, if you made a picture of a Camp Fire, you'd draw the girls all sitting down in a circle round the fire. That's the very heart of it all, to sit together round the fire; we do it whenever we can. Perhaps we aren't quite so active as the Guides; that's because we're without their soldier side, the drill, and the salutes, and the smartness, and all that. I think perhaps the quieter things show more with us; you'll more often see us sitting together working for honours, and we go in for all kinds of handcraft far more than they do—embroidery, and beadwork, and designing, and stencilling, and modelling, and fancy arts of all kinds. Of course, we can't do them all in camp, but we have them at school. The Guides stick to the very useful things. We learn things just because they're beautiful in themselves, even if they aren't particularly useful—like our beadwork, for instance. You can make lovely chains, and bags, and trimmings for hats and evening frocks; but the Guides wouldn't waste time on it. They'd be making bandages or poultices, or finding out new ways to build camp ovens, or doing carpentry, like boys.'

'I think, for girls, the things you do are quite as useful. You aren't boys, after all,' Libby argued.

'And we do the active things too. They can't beat us at running and jumping and swimming, and The Rainbow and The Mountain are the best bowlers in the school; Vera and Ruth are nowhere beside them, if they are Patrol Leaders. Nobody can beat Dawn at catches; I'm wicket-keeper for the First Eleven, and The Beaver is hockey captain. We walk quite as much as the Guides, though we don't call it route-marching! But, all the same, Ribby insists that he always thinks of us sitting down round a fire.'

'It's nice of you to call your camp after our house.'

Rowena laughed. 'We had terrible arguments over the name. "Camp Woody Dean" was what we had to fall back on to please everybody, just because it was so ordinary. We wanted an Indian name, with a beautiful sound and a big meaning hidden in it, but the Guides wouldn't hear of it. They wanted to be "Camp Britannia," or "Camp Endeavour," or "Camp Beehive," or "Camp Good Hope;" all these were suggested, and we had endless discussions over it. We ended by fixing on the simplest thing we could, and each having our own private name as well. The Guides are the 1st Woody Dean Company of Girl Guides, of course; it sounds imposing, doesn't it?'

Libby laughed. 'The 1st Woody Dean Company! Are there any others?'

'No; that's pure swank. But they say it sounds better.'

'And have you a name too?'

'Oh yes!' Rowena peeled a potato carefully, her eyes dancing. 'We're Camp Potawatomi.'

'What? Oh, please say it again!' Libby laughed.

'Camp Potawatomi. It means "The People of the Place of the Fire," and that's what we are.'

'It's rather pretty—when you get used to it! But it's a surprise at first, you know.'

'Yes, people are generally rather stunned when they hear it first. Some day Kokokoho's going to write us a poem all for ourselves, and all about us. But I don't think she's got past the stage of thinking about it yet.'

'Who is she? I don't know her.'

'Didn't you see her last night? But I dare say you wouldn't notice her; she's quiet, and half the time she's in a corner with a book, scribbling things. We say it's poems, or else a novel, but she won't let us see. She's The Owl, you know, because she's so fond of books and study. She's going to be a famous authoress some day. She's that dark girl'——

Libby began to laugh. 'If some of your Camp Fire Girls were anything but dark, it would be easier to know whom you mean when you say "that dark girl"! I've been wondering if you'd have me, if I wanted to join! There's not a single girl in your camp who isn't more or less dark, except you. Do you do it on purpose? Do you only choose dark girls so that they'll look like Indians? Tibby says that's it; that you make girls pass an entrance exam., and the first point is that they must have dark hair!'

Rowena laughed. 'What nonsense! I hadn't realised it; but now you say it, I suppose it is true. There's not a fair one among them. Queer!'

'The fair ones have all joined the Guides. I say!' cried Libby. 'Here comes your Sammy, simply flying! And Tib's after her! What has happened? Have they quarrelled?'

'A thousand miles an hour!' Rowena laughed, and moved hastily to protect her pan as Samanthy and Tib came flying towards them, terrifying Grey Edward, who was making an elaborate toilet before the camp fire, after a night in the woods. He fled, spitting indignantly, as Sammy crossed the stream in one great leap. Tib tried to do the same, but jumped short, slipped on the bank, and scrambled up with wet feet.

Sammy's face was scarlet. 'Weena, d'you know what those boys have been saying to Tib and Libby about *us*?'

Rowena looked at Lib. 'You didn't tell me anything?—What is it, Sam? I can believe anything of Ribby. Is it very dreadful?'

'I thought of it, but decided not to tell you yet,' Lib said swiftly. 'They asked us to tell you on a Monday, and it's only Saturday.'

'On a *Monday*?' Sammy stopped a breathless explanation to stare.

Rowena said curiously, 'Why on a Monday? What could it matter what day of the week you told us?'

'Because, if you were going home for the week-end, you'd have had time to—to'——

Rowena laughed, but her eyes flashed indignantly. 'To get over it, I suppose? What did they tell you about us?'

'They made fun of the Guides and the Camp Fire!' Sammy panted. 'They said we *played soldiers*, and you pretended you were Indians. Played soldiers!' There was almost a sob of wrath in her voice. She had taken her work and responsibilities as a Guide very earnestly; they were as sacred to her as the symbolism of the fire and candles to Rowena. 'Playing soldiers' was the sorest insult Sammy could have received, and she was wounded to the bottom of her heart, and almost speechless with anger.

Rowena's face flamed scarlet too. She had more self-control than Samanthy, and for a moment she said nothing, her lips pressed tightly together, her eyes blazing. Then, with a shaky laugh, she said, 'It's easy to understand that about Monday. They hoped we'd cool down before we saw them!—So you knew all about us before you met us, Libby and Tib?' There was a note of challenge and almost suspicion in her voice. Had these two laughed with the boys over all their doings?

Libby read her thought. 'We couldn't understand all they said,' she cried anxiously. 'We were in a hurry to see you, so as to know how much of it was true. We were sure they were making it up, or at least altering it all to make it sound—no, to tease us, I mean!'

'To make it sound silly,' Rowena finished. 'I can quite imagine it. Now tell me all they said!'

'They said we worked to get little, round, white things to sew on our frocks!' At this description of her precious badges Sammy nearly choked.

Rowena laughed in spite of herself. 'It was simply piggish of them, and we'll have to get even with Ribby somehow, Sam; but, of course, there was some truth in it. And that we did things for beads, I suppose?'

'They said your dress was ripping, and that you looked topping in it,' Libby pleaded. 'And Ribby would give anything to see a meeting!'

'He'll never see one if I have anything to do with it!' Rowena said grimly. 'He knows too much already!'

Tibby had been sitting with her shoes off, rubbing her feet to dry them. She looked up mischievously. 'He said if you were good little girls they gave you beads.'

'Ribby's a beast! I won't apologise for the word, either. He simply is!'

'And that if you were extra good you got a big one,' Tibby continued; 'and that when Sammy got seven badges she'd be allowed to twist a bit of white cord round her shoulder.'

'The All-Round cord! I just hate Ribby!' Sammy fumed.

'He said you swanked about your uniform no end, and he tried to describe it to us, but you know what a boy's like when he describes a girl's clothes! He said you wore bits of ribbon on your shoulders, though; that was quite right.'



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All the rest, except Sybil and Tumaga, The Bee, disappeared among the trees, and came back laden with twigs and branches.

‘I’m going to shake Ribby as soon as I get the chance!’

‘Yes, Perks said you’d want to scratch their eyes out! And they said Weena would be on the war-path too.’

Libby intervened hastily, feeling that Tib was not helping matters. ‘We didn’t believe half of it, Rowena. We didn’t know what to believe, so we waited till we should get to know you and find out for ourselves. But we were sure he was only teasing. He said you called the little ones Blue Birds. Is that true?’

‘Some of them,’ Rowena conceded. ‘The Blue Birds are the little sisters of the Camp Fire. A blue bird stands for happiness. They’re the girls who want to be members as soon as they’re twelve years old. We’re going to give a party to our Blue Birds next week. But Ribby is a pig to go and make fun of it all to you!’

‘You’ll write to him, won’t you, Weena?’ cried Sammy. ‘I’ll put in a bit too!’

‘No, I sha’n’t write,’ Rowena said grimly. ‘I’ll keep him in suspense. He’ll be expecting me to write, for he’ll know we must have met Lib and Tib by this time, and that they would tell us what he’d said. I’ll keep him wondering what we think of him.’

‘But we may meet them!’ Libby objected. ‘What if they ask us what you said?’

‘You won’t meet them while you’re about the camp as much as you’ve been lately,’ Rowena laughed. ‘And they’re going away for the week-end, to stop with a great friend of Perks’s, who only comes here for the school term, to live with an uncle. He always asks Perks, and Ribby too, for the week-end as early in the term as possible. But next Sunday they’ll be at home, and perhaps we could go home then too, Samanthy!’

Their eyes met, and Sammy said eagerly, ‘We could tell Bobs we wanted to see the boys!’

‘I rather think we do! I want to talk to Ribby, just for ten minutes. That will be quite long enough!’

‘I’ll have Perks, and after ten minutes we’ll change—if there’s anything left of them!’ Sammy vowed.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE TORCH-BEARER.

'Father dear, would you mind very much'— — Tib began coaxingly.

Mr Mackenzie laughed. 'If you went off with those fascinating Guides for the day, and left me to work all alone?'

'Well, it's Saturday! We helped you yesterday, and heaps of Guides did weeding this morning.'

'They're going out on the Downs,' Libby added. 'Wouldn't it do if we worked extra hard on Monday, father? It would be awfully nice to go with them, and they've asked us.'

'Of course you must go,' he said heartily. 'You'll help me when they're in school, won't you? Run away out on the Downs, Tibby.—What is the Camp Fire going to do, Lib?'

'They're going too. They're going to have a wildflower hunt to help Sybil. She's the littlest, you know, and she's just beginning to get honours. So she's learning wild flowers, and they're all going to show her every one they can find, and see if they can't get her fifteen new ones; she's got her first twenty. Each fifteen now will be an extra blue bead, Rowena says.'

'It's an extremely fascinating idea,' Mr Mackenzie laughed. 'I'm sure you'd like to work for beads too!'

'I would, just awfully!' Libby acknowledged wistfully, but her face was troubled as she set out with Tib.

They spent a long morning tramping on the Downs, and came home with quite a new idea of the extent of rolling green upland which surrounded their village, bare of trees except in the hollows, which might all have been named 'Woody Dean,' but thick with low-growing flowers hidden in the turf—milkwort and thyme, cowslips and lady's slipper, and in the valleys taller plants like sainfoin, marguerites, and white campion.

In the afternoon, wandering towards the camp again, they found the girls busy in more restful ways. The Guides were studying under the trees the various subjects in which they wished to qualify for badges, some at needlework, some at shorthand, some reading up the theory of nursing and First Aid. Sammy took Tib under her wing and began to instruct her in the art of tying reef-knots and building fires in the open air, and Tibby proved an apt pupil.

Lib watched them wistfully for a time, then followed her inclinations and crossed the plank bridge into Camp Potawatomi, where 'The People of the Place of the Fire' were also busy according to their various tastes. Sybil, lying under an elder-bush, was classifying her wild flowers; Romany sat near, weaving a small basket, and giving help when necessary; The Owl, whose acquaintance Lib had made during the morning tramp, sat bending over a book, as usual. The Beaver and The Bee, great friends, though Tumaga was two years the younger, were embroidering their ceremonial gowns together in a corner, for the gowns were not all finished, but were being decorated by degrees. The Bee was working an elaborate design of honeycomb pattern on her sleeve, with a big bee settled upon it here and there; The Beaver was putting a border of purple clover and green leaves around her neck, insisting that purple clover stood for industry, as of course 'Tamakwa' did also. The Mountain, leaning against a big sycamore-trunk, was working at her little loom, making a bead chain as a present for her mother, she explained; and Libby sat down to watch her, fascinated by the brightly coloured beads. The Silver Birch Tree, The Rainbow, and Killooleet, The Sparrow, were nowhere to be seen; and presently Libby asked where they were.

'Seeing there's plenty of wood for the Council Fire,' Yallani explained. 'The Wood-Gatherers collected it after dinner, but they didn't feel sure there would be enough.'

'Are they all Fire-Makers? And are they the only ones? No, you are, too, aren't you?'

'Yes. But Romany and Tamakwa and Opechee have qualified, and they'll get their bracelets to-night.'

'And you haven't any Torch-Bearers yet?'

'Not yet.' Yallani suddenly looked mysterious and changed the subject. 'Would you use those amethyst beads again, or that deeper shade this time?'

'The dark ones, I think.' Libby asked no more questions about the meeting, but looked forward to it with even greater eagerness than before. 'Is Grey Edward always washing himself?' she asked, as the camp mascot finished his afternoon toilet and rolled enjoyably before the camp fire, his little paws curled gracefully on his chest. He stretched one arm above his head, in blissful delight in the warmth, and she bent and stroked his light-gray under parts gently. 'How pretty and soft he is!'

'He isn't!' The Robin looked up from her needlework. 'He's *very* often all stuck together with mud, and then he looks just an object! *Very* draggled, and *very* dirty, and *very* ugly he looks sometimes!'

Grey Edward winked at her sleepily, and yawned, and curled himself into another graceful attitude.

'How can you, Robin?' Libby laughed reproachfully. 'He's always beautiful, and always graceful, and always gentle!'

As if to show he understood, Grey Edward curled one arm round his face and went to sleep like a baby, and Libby laughed again. 'I never saw a cat put himself into such pretty positions before!'

'You'll ruin his morals if you talk like that!' The Robin said reproachfully. 'He's the most conceited cat in existence already. The Beaver's bad enough; if you're going to spoil him too, there'll be no living with him! I do my best, but nobody backs me up!'

'He doesn't listen to you!' The Beaver looked up from her embroidery. 'He never hears a word you say! He tells me that when you begin to speak he always just goes to sleep! He's the very nicest cat that ever was!'

Opechee sniffed. 'A thief, and a wanderer, and a greedy pig, and a fighter—that's what Grey is!'

'Does he fight? He doesn't seem to have any scars! Our old cat had half his ears torn off, but Edward's are perfect.'

'No; it's a horrid libel,' said Tamakwa. 'He never fights. He only holds the coats for the other men. He knows it might spoil his beauty if his ears got torn.'

'Then he's a coward!' The Robin said instantly. 'I always knew he was!—Cowardy, cowardy Edward!'

'You're very difficult to please, Robin,' Libby laughed. 'A minute ago you were scolding him because you said he did fight!'

'He can't please me,' Opechee said promptly. 'I can't believe anything good of him. If he fights, it's bad; and if he doesn't fight, it's bad. I have to tell him what I think of him, because all the rest of you go on about him so.'

'Poor Grey Edward!' Libby laughed.

'Oh, he doesn't mind!' The Beaver remarked. 'He hasn't heard a word she's said so far!' and as if to show she spoke the truth, Grey Edward gave a gentle, sleepy snore. Then, at the shout of laughter from the girls, he woke with a start, raised his head, and looked round at them reproachfully.

'It's too bad!' Libby declared. 'They're all making fun of you, Pretty One! Go to sleep again!'

‘He isn’t pretty!’ murmured Opechee, but her protest was drowned by a laughing outcry from the rest.

By the wish of the Camp Fire Girls, Libby and Tib did not go near the camp after tea, but kept within their own garden, so as to be well out of the way, until nearly half-past seven. Then, putting on their caps and carrying their blue coats, for the evening was still and sunny, they set off in keen excitement for the ‘Place of the Council Fire.’

‘Sammy said she’d keep seats for us in a box!’ Tib laughed, almost as eager to see the ceremonies as Libby herself. ‘I wonder what she meant.’

There was no doubt of Sammy’s meaning when they reached the Chestnut Ring. All the trees were full of interested, chattering Robins, red caps and coats showing everywhere among the creamy spires of blossom. A hail from Samanthy took them to her tree, and she leaned over a branch to give them her hands and draw them up.

‘Put your foot on that knob! There you are!—Now, Lib! There, will you be comfy? Can you see?’

Dorothy and Cicely were perched on one branch, Phyllis balanced precariously on another; Samanthy and Tib had a big bough to themselves. Libby, tucked into a corner against the big tree-bole, found, to her relief, that no one was so near to her that politeness would have required her to keep up a conversation. She felt a conviction that she was going to be too much interested to talk. She had an uninterrupted view of the wide open space, framed in a wall of hawthorn-blossom, and overhung by chestnuts, and she could watch and listen without feeling she must chatter at the rate which would no doubt be necessary to Sammy and Tib.

But she did not yet understand the ‘ceremonial’ nature of the occasion. From the distant camp came a long hail, ‘Wohelo! Wohelo!’ and Samanthy hushed Tib’s questions with a peremptory word.

‘You mustn’t talk! I’ll tell you anything afterwards. This is like church, very solemn, and it’s a tremendous honour to be allowed to be here. If we talk we’ll be chucked out. So shut up!’

Tib obeyed meekly, her eyes and ears too busy to allow even her tongue to work. From the direction of the camp came the sound of singing, a low chant borne on the breeze. Down the narrow path between the hawthorns, Uda, the Guardian, led her maidens, all in ceremonial dress, their beads and fringe swaying as they walked. Still singing, they stood in a big ring; then a sudden silence fell as the Guardian raised her hand.

‘Will our Wood-Gatherers bring the wood for the Council Fire?’

Rowena and Rose, Yallani and Killooleet, remained in their places, and Lib saw that the first three carried tall, unlighted candles. All the rest, except Sybil and Tumaga, The Bee, disappeared among the trees, and came back laden with twigs and branches, which they laid on the ground. Then, invited thereto by the Guardian, the four Fire-Makers stepped forward and knelt and carefully laid the fire, and when it stood ready, placed their candles in a wide triangle about it.

The Guardian came forward, a lighted taper in her hand, its flame setting the ruddy fireflies in her head-band glittering. She handed it to Killooleet, who knelt and lit the first candle. ‘I light the Light of Work,’ said she, and recited a short ritual verse before handing back the taper.

The Guardian handed it to Yallani, who knelt and lit ‘the Light of Health,’ repeating another verse; and Libby, in the chestnut-tree, thought suddenly of Ribby’s description of the meeting: ‘They sit round a fire, and sing songs, and say weird verses.’

The third candle, ‘the Light of Love,’ was lit by Nyoda, The Rainbow. Then Miss Helen handed the taper to Rowena. ‘Tanpa, will you kindle the Council Fire?’

Rowena stepped in between the candles, and, kneeling, thrust the taper in among the sticks, her face very earnest. The flames leapt up, and as she rose the Guardian began to sing, 'Burn, fire, burn! Burn, flicker, flame!'

The whole circle of girls joined in. At the close they seated themselves quietly in a ring around the fire, and on every side the flames were reflected in the twinkling beads of chains and bands and the silver rings and bracelets. The Guardian's gown had bands of dazzling beadwork at the hem, and rows of bright-coloured crosses reaching up the skirt—the honours each of her girls had won. Sitting like the rest, she called on The Beaver to read the story of the last meeting and Tamakwa rose and read it from a big leather-bound book.

Then the roll was called, each girl answering to her ceremonial name by telling its meaning.

'Tanpa!'

'I am The Silver Birch Tree. My name means'——

And Rowena gave briefly the explanation she had given to Libby in the garden.

'Nyoda!'

'I am The Rainbow. I try always to remember that the sun will shine again after rain.'

'Romany!'

'I am The Gipsy. I love the out-of-doors and the life of the woods and hills and the open road.'

'Renée!'

'I am The Queen, the right-doer. I will try to lead people in the right way.'

'Opechee!'

'I am The Robin. I will be cheerful on dark days, as the robin sings in winter.'

'Tamakwa!'

'I am The Beaver. I will imitate the beaver's busy life.'

'Yallani!'

'I am The Mountain. I will be steadfast and unmoved from what I know to be the right.'

'Aurora!'

'I am The Dawn, the Herald of Sunshine and Life.'

'Kokokoho!'

'I am The Owl. I love books and study, and will try to grow wise.'

Then the Guardian, rising, read the list of honours won by each girl since the last meeting, and each in turn came forward to receive her beads, sometimes one or two, but more often quite a long string, for this was the first meeting since the holidays.

The next ceremony was the giving of rank. Sybil, or Tchikash, and Tumaga, The Bee, the two newest members, were called on to repeat the Wood-Gatherer's Desire, and were declared qualified to help to gather the wood for the next Council Fire. Tamakwa, Romany, and Opechee, having passed the Fire-Maker's tests, repeated their Desire, and the Guardian placed a silver bracelet on the arm of each, and bade them help to lay the fire in future.

Then, as they sat down looking much gratified, Uda addressed the circle, and the sudden deepening of interest was felt even by the Robins and visitors in the trees. New honour beads were dropped into laps, the new Fire-Makers stopped admiring their bracelets, and all eyes were fixed eagerly on the Guardian.

'Camp Fire Sisters! I have spoken privately with many of you, and I know that your wishes and mine in this matter agree. We have been a Camp Fire now for two years, and it is time we had a Torch-Bearer to be a leader among us.'

Only one girl in all the circle looked surprised; with one accord every Camp Fire Girl looked at that one as the Guardian addressed her.

'Tanpa, will you be our first Torch-Bearer?'

‘Oh, how simply topping!’ Sammy whispered in her tree, her eyes ablaze with delight. ‘Weena’ll be off her head with joy!’

For the moment, however, Rowena’s sheer surprise swamped every other feeling. In blank amazement, she stared at the Guardian. ‘I, Miss Helen? I—oh, I’m not quarter good enough!’

‘You have won the necessary honours; you are old enough; you have “mothered” six little Blue Birds for a whole term, coaching them in cricket and swimming and Nature Lore. And I have watched you among your sisters of the Camp Fire, and whether you wish for the responsibility or not, Tanpa, you are already a leader among them. I, as Guardian, have found you helpful. It is our united wish that you should be our Torch-Bearer. See to it that you so hold up your torch that your younger sisters may follow in your steps. Can you say the Desire?’

With startled, incredulous eyes, as if she believed herself in a dream, Rowena rose. ‘ “That light which has been given to me I desire to pass undimmed to others.” ’

Miss Helen placed a silver pin on the breast of her gown. ‘Girls, give our first Torch-Bearer a cheer!’

‘There’ll be no living with Weena after this!’ murmured Sammy, her eyes nearly as starry as Rowena’s own.

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE GUARDIAN'S NEWS.

'Now, girls, I want to speak to you!' The Guardian remained standing as the cheer died away, and Rowena, still looking bewildered and rather sober, took her place again between The Rainbow and The Mountain, and was warmly congratulated by both.

But, having begun, Miss Helen did not go on to tell them what she had to say. She stood looking round the big circle, in a very un-Guardianlike manner. Puzzled and curious, the girls stared at her and waited eagerly.

Suddenly she threw out her hands towards them in a despairing gesture, and there was nothing ceremonial in her tone as she cried, 'Girls, I don't know how to tell you! I knew it would be difficult, but it's even worse than I thought. I'm afraid of you all—I'm shy! Girls, you must find a new Guardian. I am going to be married in a month!'

Bright-eyed and flushed, she faced them bravely, as for a moment blank amazement held them silent.

'Oh!' breathed Libby to the chestnut-flowers. 'How pretty she is! Oh, I don't wonder, really!'

'Married!' They found their tongues suddenly, and in the clamour of questions the whispered excitement among the Guides in the trees passed unnoticed.

'But you can't be married without being engaged!' cried Yallani. 'And you've never worn a ring!'

'Oh, Miss Helen, you mustn't! Think of *us*!' groaned Nyoda.

'Who is he? Where did you meet him?' begged Kokokoho, scenting a romance.

'We can never get another Guardian like you! Oh, Miss Helen, won't you put it off?' pleaded Romany.

'Who is he? Is he nice?' asked Renée eagerly.

'So that's why she wanted a Torch-Bearer!' The Rainbow commented. 'Tanpa will have to help the new Guardian a jolly lot! I wonder whom we'll get!'

Tamakwa and Tanpa spoke together, but Rowena managed to raise her voice most loudly. 'Oh, Miss Helen, won't you tell us all about it? Who is he—lucky bounder?'

'I hate him fiercely!' said Watanopa cheerfully.

'So do I,' added Dawn. 'He's just a pig!'

There was a general laugh, as Killooleet added, 'It's simply frantic! The Camp Fire can't exist without you, Uda! Oh, do tell us all about it! Does he know what a pig he is, to take you away from us?'

'Is it a soldier? Oh, are you going to have a war wedding?' cried the little Bee, shrill with excitement. 'My sister did; she only had four days' honeymoon!'

'Oh, Miss Helen, how exciting! How simply gorgeous!' cried several together, as the Guardian, finding it impossible to make herself heard, nodded solemnly in answer to The Bee. 'Oh, do tell!'

'Shut up, then, and give her a chance!' said Rowena peremptorily. 'How could any one explain anything in all that row? Sit down, all of you!—Now, Uda *dear*!'

A breathless silence fell. The Guardian laughed, but found her task easier now that the ice was broken.

'I have been engaged since Christmas. No, I didn't tell you,' as an indignant murmur rose. 'And I didn't wear a ring, for two reasons. First, you would have had to know all about it; if I

had appeared in an engagement-ring, the news would have been all over the school in ten minutes.'

They laughed. 'Well, but why not, Miss Helen? Why weren't we to know?'

'Second, because I hadn't got a ring to wear. They don't make engagement-rings in the trenches.'

'Oh, was he in France? In the fighting?' Every girl looked up with new sympathy and understanding.

'That was why I didn't tell you. I could not help knowing he might not come back. In many ways I would have liked you all to know, for I know we should have had your sympathy and your prayers; but, on the whole, it seemed better to say nothing about it while he was in daily danger.'

'Tell us more about it, Miss Helen!' Rowena coaxed. 'Did he come home on leave? Or how did you get it fixed up?'

'We "fixed it up," as you call it, by letter,' Miss Helen laughed. 'Of course, we had been very great friends before.'

'Oh, how romantic! And now? Is he home? Or is he coming on leave? Or how are you going to get married?'

'He was wounded the day after you all went home for the Easter holidays'——

'Oh, poor Miss Helen! I am sorry!' said Killooleet sympathetically, as the girls all looked grave.

'I'm not!' The Rainbow spoke up swiftly. 'It brought him home out of it all, and now she's got him safely, and she's going to marry him and hang on to him after this.'

There was a general laugh, but the Guardian shook her head. Rowena cried anxiously, 'Isn't he all right again, Miss Helen?'

'I was visiting his people in Scotland when the news came,' Miss Helen went on with her story. 'He was not badly hurt—a simple bullet-wound—but he could not get it attended to properly at once; there were so many of them just then! The result was the wound became septic, and he was very ill for some time. They sent him to this country, and as soon as it was safe for him I went to see him.'

'I guess it sent his temp. up!' murmured Watanopa. 'I don't blame him, either!'

The Guardian laughed. 'He is now at a convalescent hospital, and expects to leave there in about a month, when he will be practically all right again. Then he will have a few weeks' leave before returning to France.'

'Oh, has he got to go back? Oh, but how awful for you!' cried The Mountain.

'For me? It's surely worse for him,' Miss Helen said swiftly. 'We are planning to be married as soon as he leaves the hospital, and have the whole of his leave together, though we may spend the end of the time with his mother. So you must look out for a new Guardian. That is the business for to-night's Council Fire.'

'Bother business! Tell us about him, Uda!' Killooleet begged.

'Is he tall and handsome? Is he dark or fair? What is he? What's his regiment?' pleaded Kokokoho eagerly.

'Fair—tall—not handsome, just nice!' Miss Helen laughed. 'He's a captain in the Argylls.'

'A Highlander! Oh, does he wear a kilt?' A spasm of excitement thrilled the circle.

'How lovely!' breathed Libby Mackenzie, while Tib chortled with delight. 'We've a cousin in the Argylls!'

'Of course he wears a kilt—on certain occasions. I've told him I won't let him be married in anything else.'

'I should think not!' Dawn cried indignantly. 'Oh, I *would* like to see him!'

'I say, she'll have to be married here, and we'll see it!' There was a perfect shriek of excitement from The Rainbow and The Robin at the same moment. 'This is her home. The marriage is always at the bride's home!'

'Oh, Miss Helen, *will* you? You won't go and be married in Scotland?'

'That would be *mean*!' The Beaver said indignantly.

'I was thinking of being married here in our own village,' Miss Helen admitted.

'And we shall see him? You'll ask us all? We can all be bride's-maids, can't we? And we'll see him in his kilt? And we'll throw down roses for you as you leave the church!' A perfect babel of excitement arose.

The Guardian laughingly put her hands over her ears. 'Yes, yes! You shall all come! How could I be married without your help? You shall have a whole holiday!—you shall see his kilt!—you shall all be introduced to him, and he'll show you his skean dhu and sporran'——

'Oh no, he'd hate that!' Rowena said quickly. 'Think of dozens of girls hanging round him! We mustn't spoil his wedding!'

'He's prepared for the ordeal. He knows all about you. He says it's the one thing that made him hesitate about asking me—that he knew if he married me he'd have to marry the Camp Fire as well, and have a boarding-school wedding! He says he draws the line at more than twenty bride's-maids! It's never done in the best society!'

The girls laughed, excitement and delight in all their faces.

'There are seventy girls in the school!' Watanopa hinted darkly. 'He does know about us, then?'

'He's trying to brace himself up to the point of coming to see you all before the wedding,' Miss Helen said solemnly. 'He says it's worse than the trenches.'

'I think I shall like him!' The Rainbow laughed.

'But do tell me something, Uda dear!' Rowena cried eagerly. 'After he goes back to France, won't you come back here? You can't live alone? Couldn't you go on being our Guardian?'

'Oh, Miss Helen, do!'

'Just for the length of the war!' pleaded The Beaver.

But Miss Helen was resolute on that point. 'No—no—no! I may come back here, but I shall have to be away a good deal; his mother is lonely, and wants my company. You must have a new Guardian. I shouldn't be able to do enough for you.'

'We'd rather have half as much done by you than twice as much done by any one else,' Yallani assured her eagerly.

'But I wouldn't rather know you were doing with only half as much! Has anybody any suggestions?'

The girls looked at one another in blank silence. The thought of any one in Uda's place was hard to face.

'Oh, Firefly, why must you go and get married?' groaned The Robin.

'Couldn't you keep on, Uda dear?' begged Dawn.

Miss Helen shook her head. 'It's getting late. We shall have to put out our fire and go back to camp. Girls, you must keep the matter in mind, and next'——

'Oh, we sha'n't forget it, Guardian dear!' The Silver Birch Tree promised her.

Uda laughed, her colour rising, for she knew the amount of excited chatter and discussion there would be. 'Talk it over together, and see if any one has any ideas for a new Guardian.'

'I haven't!' The Beaver said mournfully. 'I don't want to have, either.'

'I say, Miss Helen, do they know at school?' cried Killooleet. 'They didn't know yesterday.'

'Only my sister knows, of course. You may tell them, if you wish.'

'*If we wish!* Oh, how ripping! You're a darling, you know! I say, won't there be excitement?' Killooleet chortled exuberantly.

'I have asked my sister to allow us to prolong the camp for a second week, as it is likely to be my last,' the Guardian began.

But the last part of the sentence, which might have damped their high spirits, was drowned in the chorus of delight and gratitude. She asked for silence with a peremptory gesture. 'Her permission is, of course, subject to the usual three conditions: that our hosts at Woody Dean are willing we should stay, that you all keep well and fit, and that your school work does not suffer. You must see to those last two conditions for yourselves. So I propose that we have another ceremonial meeting next Saturday, to decide finally on some one to whom we can send an invitation, offering her the post of Guardian. That will give you a chance to talk it over and come prepared with suggestions. What do you say?'

'Bully! Except that we don't want a new Guardian!' said The Beaver.

'Couldn't the meeting be on Friday night, Uda?' The Rainbow asked. 'There's the Eastwood match on Saturday, and so many of us have to be there.'

'I forgot the match. Yes, on Friday, then. Now, girls, you have not much choice of a new Guardian. I think she must be some one in the school. I'll give you an idea, and you can think it over; but don't let a whisper of it reach any one outside our camp, for if you don't care to ask her, she might feel hurt if she knew. I propose you ask Miss Betts.'

'Betty!' There was a pause, expressive of utmost astonishment. This was quite a new idea. Miss Helen allowed it some moments to sink in, and the girls looked at one another, some nodding thoughtfully, some pursing their lips, some raising brows in surprise.

'That's "some" idea, Uda,' The Silver Birch Tree said gravely at last. 'I'd never thought of Betty, but she might be able to do it. But would she? It must mean a lot of work.'

'I can't say that, of course. I have said nothing to her. But we could ask her. The fact that she is Domestic Science mistress would be valuable.'

'She'd look after the Home and Hand Craft honours, anyway,' Romany laughed. 'She'd be stricter than you've been, Miss Helen.'

'We shouldn't get them so easily, that's a fact,' The Beaver agreed. 'I wonder if she would.'

'I believe she would. She's good sport,' said The Mountain suddenly. 'D'you remember that time I sprained my wrist just before a match and couldn't bowl, and as we were allowed one mistress in the team, Betty offered to take my place? She got three men out, too.'

'Jolly slow lobs. I remember; she was quite brilliant.' The Rainbow agreed. 'I say, perhaps she wouldn't be so bad, Uda!'

'She's awfully jolly out of class!' a little voice piped up, and The Bee reddened as everybody laughed.

But Sybil nodded also. 'She is, too. We're in her dormitory, so we know!'

'Do you suppose she'd wear a gown, and work for beads?' Watanopa asked dubiously. 'It would be horrid to have a Guardian who didn't. She'd always seem half an outsider.'

'I say, I don't know about that!' cried The Gipsy. 'It's rather queer for a mistress to dress up and sit on the floor! It's all right for Miss Helen, but mistresses—well, they think they've got to be stiff and starchy, don't you know!'

'To keep up appearances,' Miss Helen laughed. 'I can't tell you how far Miss Betts would be willing to go, of course, but I believe she would be a good Guardian.'

'Yes, but—*would she put her hair down*?' The Queen voiced the question in the minds of all.

It was a momentous question, and the girls looked at one another again. To them the point was not so trivial as it seemed. The turned-up hair was the symbol of years of discretion, and

in Miss Betts's case of authority. Would she be willing to discard it and meet them around their fire on equal terms, as one of themselves? Would she try to bridge the gulf which necessarily separated her from them at present?

Miss Helen read their thoughts, and made mental notes for Miss Betts's guidance, if the invitation should be given.

'We'd like a Guardian who would do the thing properly,' Watanopa said doubtfully. 'We wouldn't want to remember she was Miss Betts all the time!'

'But wouldn't she take an Indian name?' The Queen asked. 'That would help.'

'I believe she'd do the whole thing—name, and gown, and beads, and hair, and head-band, and all! Betty's sporty,' The Mountain insisted. 'She'd know how we'd feel about it.'

'I think we'd like to talk it over first, though, Uda,' The Silver Birch Tree said cautiously.

'Of course. I only make the suggestion to help you. We will meet next Friday, then, and decide what to do. Now we really must get to bed! Here is the moon high already.—Tanpa, will you and Nyoda and Yallani see to the fire, while the rest of us go back to camp and boil the kettle for cocoa?—Let us sing together, then, girls.'

Standing round the dying fire, they sang, 'Lay me to Sleep in Sheltering Flame;' then, led by Miss Helen, they filed away through the moonlit wood towards the camp. Rowena, Rose, and Elsa stayed behind to put out the fire, throwing handfuls of earth upon it till only ashes were left, and to gather up the little mats on which the girls had been sitting.

From every chestnut-tree came Robins, full of suppressed excitement.

'Rowena, what a ripping meeting! But what will you do without Miss Helen?'

'Collapse and die, I expect. Existence without her isn't possible,' Rowena retorted.

'Weena, let me see your pin! Wasn't it topping of them to make you a Torch-Bearer? I can't imagine why they did it! None of us can!' Samanthy teased. 'Do let me see it, Weena! I say, wasn't I good? I thought I'd have to cheer or burst, but I knew you'd rather I'd burst than make a row.'

'It was awfully hard on Sam. She nearly exploded with excitement,' Dorothy assured them. 'I think she was a perfect heroine to keep so quiet.'

'I say, all you Guides!' Rose's voice rang out. 'You'll be jolly careful to keep all this a secret, won't you? I mean about Betty, of course. It would be awful if she heard, and then we didn't invite her.'

'Oh, I guess we shall. The girls are quite inclined to try her,' Yallani said easily.

'We must think about it first, though. It wouldn't be easy to get rid of her afterwards. So do mind what you're about, all of you!'

'A Guide's honour can be trusted,' said Miss Fenton, coming into the group. 'You can rely on them safely, Rose. They quite understand that all they have heard to-night has been in confidence. No Guide would betray such a trust.—Now, girls, get back to camp as quickly as you can!—Vera and Ruth, see they get their supper at once. I will see our visitors safely home. —Come along, Libby and Tib! Your mother will be wondering what has happened to you!'

'Awfully stale for Tib! I know she wanted to talk to me!' murmured Samanthy, as they turned away. 'I say, Weena, you never asked to see Miss Helen's ring! She's sure to have got one now. I nearly shrieked at you! Aren't you pining to see it? Do you suppose it's diamonds?'

'She loves rubies. She said so the other day, when we were talking about beads. She laughed, too, so I suppose she was thinking about this. We'll make her wear it all the time now,' Rowena promised.

CHAPTER XIX.
TIB THE TRAITOR.

'Miss Helen's going to be married in a month, to a captain in the Argylls! So they've got to get a new Guardian, and they think they'll ask Miss Betts; but they aren't sure if she'll wear beads and put her hair down!' Tibby ended an excited description of the ceremonial meeting over the supper-table.

'Tib! You weren't to say anything about Miss Betts! That's a secret!' Libby cried in dismay.

'Oh, it doesn't matter just for mother and father!' Tib said easily.

'That camp won't get to sleep till midnight, with all those items to talk over!' Mr Mackenzie laughed.

Rowena confirmed this in the morning. Sunday breakfast was late at Woody Dean, and the girls had plenty of time for a visit to the camp before it was ready. 'Talking after lights out is very bad form in camp, but last night was rather an exception,' the new Torch-Bearer confessed. 'Miss Helen and Madam were generous; they knew we shouldn't sleep if we didn't work it off a little.'

'The ring's lovely!' Samanthy added. 'Pearls and rubies; she says she always thinks diamonds look cold. We all think it's simply topping! And she says she's glad we're satisfied with it! She's going to wear it always now.—I say, Tib, come for a walk with Cicely and me this afternoon! We'll go down on the shore.'

'Then Libby must come with me,' Rowena said promptly, seeing the shadow on Lib's face again. 'Rose and Elsa and I are going up on the Downs, and Sybil and The Queen and The Gipsy are coming too, so we shall be quite a crowd.'

'Me too!' said Dawn, coming up behind them. 'And Watanopa won't be left out, I know. The Owl's writing the Count of last night's meeting, so she won't come.'

'You won't want me. You'll want to talk about Miss Betts,' Libby said doubtfully.

Tanpa laughed. 'We shall talk about her, of course. We're doing it all the time. But that's no reason why you shouldn't come. You know you mean to join the Camp Fire, so she'll be your Guardian too.'

'Perhaps I won't. Perhaps I'll join the Guides.' Libby's voice was low and strained, and she looked away as she spoke.

Rowena gave her a startled glance. 'Oh, rubbish! Of course you're coming into Camp Potawatomi! I'd be fearfully offended if you didn't. And to-night, if you feel like it, you should both come to Camp Service. We sing and have stories round the camp fire. It's rather jolly.—I say, Dawn, Samanthy's getting over it! She's forgotten her loss already.'

'Yes. I'm glad Tibby came along and put it out of her head,' Aurora agreed.

'What has she lost? What's been the matter?' Libby asked, glad to have the subject changed.

The Birch Tree and The Dawn laughed together. 'It's Grey Edward,' said Rowena. 'I mean, he's the culprit. Hadn't you heard of Alfonso?'

'The sweetest little field-mouse,' Dawn added. 'He walked into Sam's tent on Friday evening and made himself quite at home. They're very tame sometimes, you know, if you move about gently and don't scare them. So Sammy decided to adopt him, and christened him Alfonso; we couldn't find out why.'

'Oh, she said he looked like it. That's quite reason enough for Sam! He stayed with her all Saturday, sitting in a corner of the tent, and being fed on biscuit-crumbs, till we said he'd die

of overfeeding. Watanopa threatened to write to the Food Controller about it, and said he was exceeding his rations! But this morning, very early, he took it into his head to go home and visit his relations. Sam's sure he had a little wife, and had gone to fetch her and the children to live with him. And Grey Edward happened to be coming home after a night out, and unfortunately they met, and—well, it was the end of Alfonso! Samanthy was in an awful way about it, but I don't really see how you could blame Edward.'

'Just think of his feelings!' laughed Dawn. 'Fancy meeting a mouse running—Alfonso always ran like a streak of lightning—through *his* camp! I'm sure Grey Edward considers it his camp. I don't see what else he could do!'

'Of course it's his camp. Isn't he the mascot?' and The Beaver came up, Edward lying like a baby in her arms and purring contentedly, with half-closed eyes and a very happy 'Sunday' expression on his face. 'He was just coming home for his biggest Sunday wash, and there was that horrid, dirty, slimy little creature running straight to meet him! He always understood it was his duty to keep the camp clear of vermin!'

'Don't let Sammy hear you!' Dawn advised. 'Alfonso was the apple of her eye and the darling of her heart—for the moment.'

'All the same, he was Edward's enemy, and he had to be made away with. But The Robin's been just horrid about it!' Tamakwa said mournfully. 'Grey Edward's just disgusted with her! Such names as he's been called this morning!'

'I thought he didn't listen?' Libby laughed.

'He tried not to, but he heard her through his sleep this time. There now, isn't he pretty? Elizabeth Mackenzie, you never saw anything sweeter in your life!'

Edward had stretched up a soft little paw to pat Tamakwa's cheek, by way of intimation that he would like to be put down before the fire for his morning nap, instead of being carried round lying on his back like an infant. The Beaver rubbed her cheek on his paw, and continued to walk up and down, holding him in her arms.

'Isn't pretty! Isn't sweet!' The Robin had come to set the breakfast-table, and overheard the last few words. 'He's just a horrible murderer! I wonder you can bear to touch him! Think of that dear little gray mouse inside him!'

'He couldn't help it! He had to!'

'You feel you need to apologise for him, anyway!' Opechee retorted. 'I'm just disgusted with him! He's the horridest'——

'He's not! He's just the sweetest cat!' The Beaver insisted.

'All the same, he did give The Robin a chance that time, Beaver,' Libby laughed.

'He's got the sweetest little nose, and the longest whiskers, and the dearest little green eyes, and the most beautiful stripes on his face!' murmured Tamakwa.

'And the biggest conceit for the littlest body!' Opechee finished for her.

Libby and Tib accepted both Rowena's invitations, and found real enjoyment in the Sunday evening service in the woods, when the whole camp sat round one smouldering camp fire, and sang favourite hymns, listened to Bible readings by several of the senior girls, and then to an address from Miss Fenton, when she told the story of some great Christian woman—in this case Mary Slessor of Calabar. The girls listened in rapt interest, for she was interested herself and told her story well. Libby, lying on the grass between The Beaver and The Bee, looked up into the great sycamores, with their green drooping tassels, her thoughts half here and half in Calabar. Next time the camp was held at Woody Dean, she was resolved to be there as one of its members, not merely as a visitor. But how; and in which camp? The question was still tormenting her, for there was no doubt where Tibby would be.

Every day that next week she and Tib watched the Brownies climb the hill and disappear over the crest on their way to school. Sometimes they were Robins, in crimson caps and

jerseys, sometimes bareheaded Brownies. Towards the end of the week they were often shrouded in mackintoshes, for the sunshine gave place to occasional fine rain, and meals had to be taken in the big marquee in the Guides' camp. The girls kept cheerful, however, slackened their tent ropes, did their cooking on the stoves in the kitchen tents instead of over the camp fire, played games, sang, and worked for honours and badges in the mess-tent during the evening, and were very careful, with knowledge gained in previous experiences, not to touch their canvas walls as they went to bed.

Day after day Libby and Tib visited them, and generally carried some gift. Once it was early roses from their sheltered garden for Nyoda to arrange on the supper-tables in the big tent; often it was armfuls of wild flowers, or a bundle of rhubarb from the garden for pies and tarts, or oat-cakes made by the cook who had come from Scotland. And always they saw to it that the stock of firewood was kept up, so that the 'Wood-Gatherers' of both camps found their occupation gone. Protests did not move them; these things were all they could do, and they delighted in them.

The division between the two which Libby had dreaded was visible to everybody now. It was taken for granted both at home and in the camp that Tib would haunt the Guides and Samanthy, and Lib find her friends in the Camp Fire. But the thought of it still hurt Libby, and she shrank from any reference to it. Rowena and the rest knew they must not tease her on Tib's infatuation for the Guides, and though puzzled by the intensity of her feeling on what seemed to them such a simple point, they respected her obvious wish and ignored the fact.

But the division was deeper than Lib had realised. Mischievous factors were at work in Tibby of which she knew nothing. And the worst of all was that Tibby alone was to blame. Her friendship with Samanthy had nothing to do with the new trouble which now arose.

'What are you doing this evening, Lib?' Tibby asked carelessly on Tuesday afternoon—the last day of the fine weather in more senses than one.

'I was going to help at the Blue Birds' tea. The Camp Fire are inviting a lot of the little ones from school for tea, and then games. Rowena said I might help to hand round, and play with them afterwards. Will you come too? I'm sure they'd be pleased. The Guides are going out with Madam,' Lib added. 'It's not their party at all.'

'I know. They're all going on the beach. No, I guess I won't come to the party, Lib.'

And Libby, supposing Tib had an arrangement with Samanthy, said no more.

But Tib did not go to the beach. When Libby had started for the camp, she took the road to the village. They had not met the boys since that day on the cliffs, for the lure of the camp had drawn them continually up the valley to the woods; but she knew their time for arriving home from school, and had no difficulty in waylaying them in the road, a short distance from their home. She stood in the middle of the road and waved her arms, and they slowed down at once and jumped off their cycles beside her.

'You seem to spend your life trying to spill people on bikes!' said Perks. 'Well, how's the camp getting on?'

'Where's Libby? I say, Tib, what did Weena and Sammy say when she told them?' Ribby laughed. 'Did she wait till Monday? I haven't heard from them yet!'

'Libby meant to wait till Monday, but I told them on Saturday,' Tib explained. 'Oh, they were awfully mad, of course! I think Sammy would have flown at you if she'd had you there. Rowena was very angry too, and they said you were a beast and a pig.'

'Good old Weena! Well, I was!' Ribby laughed. 'Why hasn't she written to tell me so?'

'I think she's saving it up till she sees you. I say, I've something to tell you!'

'So you jolly well ought to have, after stopping us like that! Well?'

'Do you still want to see a Camp Fire ceremonial meeting? You said the girls would never tell you when there was going to be one.'

The boys looked at her, and then at one another. 'Well?' Ribby asked slowly.

'There's one next Friday, at half-past seven, in the Chestnut Ring, or, if it's wet, in the big barn near our back-gate. We heard them planning it, and I thought—I thought you'd like to know. You said you wanted to see one!' she ended defiantly. She had begun triumphantly, but something in the odd look which Ribby cast at Perks made her suddenly uneasy. 'Well, what's the matter?' she demanded indignantly.

'Did they tell you to tell us?' Ribby was suspending judgment.

'Goodness me, no! You must never tell them how you knew!' There was a note of alarm in Tibby's voice.

'Did Libby know you were going to tell us?' Perks demanded. 'Where is she?'

'Helping the Camp Fire to give tea to their Blue Birds. No, she didn't know. She thinks I've gone with Sammy and the Guides.'

'Of course Libby didn't know. She's straight,' said Ribby coldly.

'Ribby Stanley, what d'you mean by that?' Tib flared.

'Well, Tib Mackenzie, why didn't you tell Libby?' he retorted.

Tib's eyes fell before his. She knew very well both what he meant and why she had not told Libby.

'Come on, Perks. Let's get home.' Ribby mounted his cycle again.

Tib's disappointment and smarting conscience flared up into anger again. 'Ribby, you are a pig! I thought you wanted to know so much! You said you'd give anything to know! And you haven't even said, "Thank you"!'

Tears of bitter disappointment filled her eyes. But Ribby knew no mercy. He was not old enough to see that she quite failed to realise the enormity of her action, and had acted from a purely mischievous motive. Only the treachery of it was apparent to him, and he cared nothing for her anger or disappointment.

'I didn't want to know this way,' he said coldly. 'I do think you're a sneak, Tib Mackenzie. —Come on, Perks, old chap!'

'Little cad!' he added, as they rode away.

Tibby heard the words; she had been meant to hear. She stumbled blindly to the bank and sank down upon it, crying bitterly. And at that moment, down the road which led from the town came the Guardian of the Fire, cycling as fast as she dared, for she had been shopping, and was late for the Blue Birds' party.

But she could not ignore that tumbled little heap of distress by the roadside. The blue knitted coat and cap and shower of red curls were unmistakable; but she would have stopped, even if she had not known the girl, at sight of the angry sobs which shook her.

'Why, Tibby, what's the matter? Have you hurt yourself?' No, this was anger, not pain. 'Have you quarrelled with Samanthy? Not with Lib, surely?'

Tib was too far gone for self-control or thought. The story came out with a rush; she must tell some one, and find comfort, or die! 'The boys—Ribby and Perks—they wanted to see a Camp Fire meeting—they said they'd give *anything* to see one! But no one would tell them when there was to be one. I met them and told them of next Friday's, and—and they never said, "Thank you"! They were mad, and Ribby called me names! And I only did it to please them! They weren't pleased a bit, and he called me a—a cad—and a sneak! I thought he'd be so pleased, and it would be such fun!' and her sobs broke out afresh.

Miss Helen wheeled her cycle through a gap in the high green bank, on to the turf of the cliff-edge, then put her arm round Tibby and gently forced her to follow, where they would be out of sight of passers-by. It was quiet here, with only the lonely strip of turf above the cliff and sea. Tib collapsed on the inner bank and cried again, and Miss Helen sat down beside her.

‘But, Tibby, don’t you think it was rather a mean thing to do? What would the girls feel if the boys watched their meeting without leave? What would Rowena say if she heard of it?’

Tib looked at her with frightened, tear-dimmed eyes. ‘I oughtn’t to have told you!’ she gasped. ‘I never thought you were you!’

Miss Helen caught her arm as she tried to spring away. ‘Now that’s no use! You can’t get away from me! Sit down, you silly girl! Of course you oughtn’t to have told me! I’m about the last person to be told, except perhaps Libby, or Rowena, or Sammy. But you have told me, and you did it yourself, so now you must hear what I have to say about it.’

‘You shouldn’t have come along just then!’ Tib muttered sulkily.

‘My dear Tibby, don’t be too silly! If you will cry your heart out on a high-road, you must take the consequences. I’m far too fond of girls to pass by one in such trouble.’

‘Wish you weren’t!’ said Tib’s face, so plainly that there was no need for her lips to speak.

Miss Helen laughed. Then she grew very grave. ‘Now, Tib, tell me just one thing! Why did you tell the boys the date of our meeting?’

‘Because they wanted to know so badly, and I thought they’d be so pleased, and it would be fun for them to see it.’

‘And did you never stop to think that it was a secret, which you, as our guest, were in honour bound to respect?’

Tibby sat staring at the seagulls, and her cheeks grew red.

‘Did you tell Libby what you were going to do?’ Miss Helen asked, watching her closely.

‘Gracious, no!’ Tib’s tone showed she was horrified at the very idea.

‘Why not?’

Tibby quivered. These were the awkward questions the boys had raised. She knew very well why she had not told Libby.

‘And do you want Sammy and Rowena to hear about it? No? Oh, I’m not going to tell them, of course! But I thought perhaps, if you felt it was such a good joke, you would want to share it with Sammy.’

‘Of *course* I can’t tell Sammy!’ Tib burst out indignantly. ‘Why d’you ask me? You know she’d be as mad as mad!’

‘And Libby and Rowena too. You see how it would look to all of them? Then, Tibby dear, how *could* you do such a thing?’

Tib’s head dropped on her arms in her lap. ‘I didn’t think!’ she wailed. ‘I didn’t mean to be horrid! I just thought it would be fun, and would please the boys. And they weren’t pleased!’

‘Of course they weren’t pleased! Boys like fair-play. They hate anything sneaking and underhand.’

Tibby writhed. ‘I didn’t mean it that way. I never thought of it being mean! Oh, Miss Helen, I never thought!’

Miss Helen put her arm round her. ‘I know you didn’t, Tib. I really believe you acted only out of mischief, meaning to tease the girls and nothing more. But, dear, you must see how wrong it was. It was betraying a secret, and that is one of the most dishonourable things you could do. If I thought you had realised what you were doing, I should be far more angry with you, but I believe you did not stop to think. And yet you knew it was wrong, Tibby, for you were afraid to tell Lib.’

‘Lib’s so particular!’ Tibby murmured, ashamed even as she said it, however.

‘Particular! Don’t you wish you’d been a little more particular this time? Think it over, dear! Of course, I shall not tell the girls, and I do not think the boys will take advantage of your information. I can’t be sure; you have made it very difficult for them, for they will be strongly tempted when the time comes. But if they are as much like their sisters as one might expect, they won’t stoop to spying on our meeting. Now I must hurry on. But, Tibby dear, try

to realise what a very mean thing you have done, and how bad it would appear to the other girls. Try to have a higher standard of honour; yours is altogether too low, if it can include jokes which are underhand and treacherous. Think about it, dear!'

Miss Helen hurried away to help to entertain the Blue Birds, and for an hour Tibby lay on the turf, unnoticed by any one but the seagulls and larks and blackbirds. 'A low sense of honour!' 'Underhand and treacherous!' 'Sneaking—mean—dishonourable!' Tib had been suddenly shown quite a new view of her own conduct and character, and Miss Helen's words went deep. If she had been really wanting in a sense of honour, she might have resented them and hardened her heart; but she had only been thoughtless and impetuous, and these ugly ideas stung something new into life within her. Miss Helen had spoken to her wisely, and had done well in trusting her better self.

Tib rose stiffly at last, and, with a long tired sigh, turned homewards and left the cliffs to the seagulls.

CHAPTER XX.
TIB IN TROUBLE.

In the Chestnut Ring twenty little Blue Birds, younger girls all under twelve years of age, sat in a big circle and enjoyed a picnic tea, waited on by their elder sisters of the Camp Fire. Libby Mackenzie helped in the handing round with much enjoyment, and joined as happily as any in the games which followed. A big party from the camp escorted the little ones over the Downs at bed-time, and on their return journey met the Guides coming home from their picnic on the shore.

'Where's Tib?' Libby asked Samanthy. 'Did she go home another way?'

'Tib? She hasn't been with us. I haven't seen her since the morning. We asked her to come, but she said she couldn't.'

'Couldn't?' Lib echoed, much mystified. 'But how funny! I wonder where she's been? I thought she said she was going with you!'

She hurried home to inquire into the mystery, but found Tibby already in bed. 'I've got a bad headache,' she explained, lying humped up with her face to the wall. 'I went a walk down to the village, and it was hot;' and Libby could get no more out of her.

Even next morning she could get no fuller explanation. Tib's headache was better, but she did not seem quite herself. She would not say what was the matter, but helped her father in his weeding much more silently than usual. And after dinner she disappeared, and was gone for an hour, without giving any explanation of her conduct. She reappeared looking, to Libby's anxious eyes, troubled and unhappy, but no questions from her sister could win any satisfactory answer. Libby wondered earnestly whether she ought not to tell her mother of this mysterious 'business' which had taken Tibby alone to the village, and was obviously weighing upon her. But she shrank from any appearance of telling tales, and waited a little longer in the hope that Tib would explain. The fact that Tib was keeping a secret from her, for the first time in her life, hurt Libby so keenly that she could hardly bear to face it even to herself, and felt that to speak of it even to her mother would be too much.

After a night and morning of anxious guilty thought, Tibby had braced herself to an ordeal. She must try now to put right the wrong she had done; that was all that remained to her. It was the boys' half-holiday, and she sought them early, before they would have set out for the afternoon.

Quaking, but determined, she pushed open the heavy gates of the big house opposite the church, climbed the steps, and knocked. If she could only have found them somewhere in field or garden, and been spared this ordeal! Or if she could have had Libby's company! To seek them out in this way took far more courage than either of the boys realised. If they had understood, they would have dealt with her more gently.

With trembling knees and a shake in her voice, Tib asked if she might speak to Ribby. The maid led her to a big drawing-room, and turned to go, remarking that the boys were in the cycle-shed.

'Oh, could I go to them there, please?' faltered the culprit. Surely it would be easier to speak in less formal surroundings!

Very nervously she followed the girl out to the garden and across a yard. The boys, in flannels and gaily-striped blazers, were busy pumping up their tires before setting out for a match at school.

'A young lady to see you, Master Ribby,' said the maid, and withdrew.

The boys straightened up and stared at her. 'Well?' queried Ribby, as she stood trembling and hesitating. 'Come to give away any more secrets?'

'You're a beast, Ribby Stanley!' and Tib's pent-up nervousness found vent in anger. Her nerves were overstrained, and her words poured out, not pleading as she had meant, but hot and angry. 'I came to ask you to forget what I told you yesterday, but I don't suppose you'll do it. You're such a pig! I see now I shouldn't have told you. I hadn't thought of it at the time. I hadn't any right to tell you of it, and—and *you* haven't any right to—to remember what I said!'

'Oh, you see that now, do you?' Ribby had turned to his cycle again, while Perks watched her curiously. 'Pity you didn't think of it before!'

'I thought you thought it was such a good joke?' Perks inquired. 'Seemed to me jolly sneaky, but you didn't seem to see it. Been thinking it over all night?'

Tib's cheeks flamed, but she had realised the wisdom of pleading rather than anger. 'Well, what if I have? Things look different when you've thought about them.'

'That's why it's a jolly good plan to do your thinking first,' Ribby said coolly, without looking up.

'I wish I had!' Tib said vehemently. 'I'd—I'd never have told you *anything* if I'd thought!'

'No, I guess you wouldn't,' he conceded; 'but that's only because we told you it was mean. You didn't see it for yourself. I do like girls to be straight, but as a rule they aren't. Thank goodness, Weena and Sam are as straight as boys! Say, have you told them you told us? Or Libby?'

'*No!* You won't come and watch the meeting, will you?' Tib changed the subject hastily, and her tone grew anxious. 'Ribby, I didn't think what an awful thing I was doing! You won't go and—and take advantage of it, will you?'

'Can't say, I'm sure.' Ribby inspected his back-tire carefully. 'Can't possibly say what I'll do on Friday. I might go, and, again, I mightn't.'

'You're mean!' Tibby burst out wrathfully.—'Can't *you* stop him?' and she turned to Perks. 'Won't you be nice about it?'

'Can't possibly.' Perks, as usual, took his cue from his brother. 'I wouldn't mind "being nice," as you call it, but I jolly well can't stop Ribs doing anything if he wants to do it. He's boss of us two; there's no getting away from that. Little me's nowhere!'

Tib turned to Ribby, her voice unsteady; tears were dangerously near, and he guessed it and took alarm. 'Won't you promise? Oh, Ribby, don't be mean!'

'Now look here, Tib Mackenzie!' and he began to wheel his cycle towards the back-gate. 'You don't seem to see that you aren't half asking a lot! For a year I've wanted to see one of those meetings. Here you come and give me the very chance I'm so keen on, and then you expect me not to take it, just because you've been a little sneak! I want to see that meeting like mad, and I don't see why I shouldn't when I've got the chance. That's how I feel about it. I won't promise anything. Of course, I see that we oughtn't to take advantage of your meanness, but I tell you it's just a low trick on your part to give us the chance of the thing we want so awfully badly, and then ask us not to take it. I don't know what I'll do. I do know what it will be jolly difficult not to do—and that is, go and watch that meeting!—Come on, Perks! We'll be late!—This is the way out, Tib Mackenzie. We've got to go now.'

Tib followed him dumbly. 'I didn't think—about making it hard for you,' she faltered.

'Pity you didn't think a bit more,' Perks grunted.

Outside the gate Ribby turned. 'Of course, there's one thing you can do!' he said grimly. 'You don't seem to have thought of that either.'

'What is it, please?' she asked meekly.

‘Tell some of them—Weena, for choice; but either Libby or Sam would know what to do. Tell them what you’ve done. Then they’ll change the date of the meeting. I don’t know why I should give you the hint, though.’

‘Because if they change the date you can’t go and watch it, and you know you oughtn’t to!’ Tib flashed at him. ‘You know you’ll be mean if you do!’

He laughed grimly. ‘Come on, Perks. I’ve had enough of girls!’ and they rode off.

‘She’s right, though,’ he conceded when they were out of hearing. ‘That’s just it. If they’d change the date so that we couldn’t possibly go, it would be a jolly sight easier for us. She doesn’t see even yet what a hole it puts us in. If we didn’t care it would be different, but I’m as keen as mustard to see one of those meetings, and yet I shall feel a rotter if I go to this one.’

‘Shall you go?’ Perks queried.

‘Not if I can stop myself when it comes to the bit, but I’ll not answer for that. I want to go frantically.’

‘You’ll get her in an awful mess if you do go.’

‘I shall hate her for ever if I don’t. Because I’ll have had the chance and lost it, don’t you see? Wonder what’s brought her round!’

Tibby went home without having gained the easier mind she had hoped for. She had done her best, but she doubted much whether her efforts would bring any success. It was with a heavy heart she helped Libby to gather wood for the two camp fires, and Libby was silent and unhappy also. For she carried two burdens—one, Tib’s unknown trouble, in which she longed to be able to help; the other, the fact that a secret was being kept from her, and that something real, though unseen, had come between them at last.

Their father and mother, as it chanced, were spending the afternoon and evening in the neighbouring town, first doing some necessary shopping, then going to an evening concert. Mrs Mackenzie was keenly musical, and there was always good music to be heard in the town. She had had few chances of this pleasure in their lonely Highland life, and had looked forward eagerly to the chances now offered her. So she was not aware of the cloud overhanging the girls, which had deepened perceptibly since Tibby’s afternoon visit to the village, and she was not at home to bid them stay indoors when fine rain began to fall just after tea.

‘I wonder what they’ll do in the camp. It won’t be very nice, will it?’ Libby stood looking at the rain.

‘It’s only mist; they won’t mind.’ Tib’s tone was listless.

‘They’d get back from school dry, anyway, and that’s something. Shall we go and see what they’re doing?’

Tibby was not eager to go to the camp, but dared not say so; that would have been too sudden a change from her former attitude.

‘All right, let’s go. I’d like to see Sammy,’ she added wistfully. With Samanthy she would not feel so guilty as she would with the Camp Fire.

Lib turned suddenly. ‘Tib, don’t you like Rowena too?’

For the moment she was strung up to speak almost as Tibby had been when she faced the boys. It was never easy for Libby to speak out when she felt deeply; as a rule, all her deeper feelings were shyly hidden. But for some days she had felt that a decision would have to be made. Every one assumed that she would join the Camp Fire, and Tib the Guides. But that meant separation, and Libby felt she could not bear it. Was there no possible chance of carrying Tibby with her in this crisis? Could not the Camp Fire take them both in?

‘No!’ burst from Tibby vehemently; then, at Lib’s startled look, she realised suddenly that her sister could not understand. ‘Oh, of course I like her well enough! She’s all right! What d’you mean, Libby?’

Lib was looking very much troubled. ‘I was wondering if—if, when we go to school, you would join the Camp Fire if I do? It would be so much jollier’——

A sudden wave of colour swept over Tibby’s face. ‘I couldn’t possibly. I—I don’t like the Camp Fire!’ she said hurriedly. ‘Besides, I promised Sammy.’

‘Don’t like the Camp Fire?’

‘Well, I don’t want to belong to it, anyway. I’m going to be a Guide, and drill, and have a uniform. Sammy says she’ll train me; she has to train a Tenderfoot before she can be a First-Class Guide.’

Libby turned to gaze out at the thin rain. Could she give up the Camp Fire? *Could* she? Her heart would always lie there; she knew that well. Could she be a half-hearted Guide for Tibby’s sake? It was not really for Tibby’s sake, however, for Tib had never asked it of her. For what, then? Could she bear to be separated for all her school life in all her interests from her sister? It was a hard problem, and Libby was sober-faced under the weight of a third burden as they donned boots and mackintoshes and caps, and set out for the camp in silence, for neither had much to say, and both had much to think about.

CHAPTER XXI.
LIBBY'S CAMP FIRE NAME.

Samanthy, tidying up the Guides' camp in a mackintosh and sou'-wester, greeted them with a shout. 'Go into the mess-tent, won't you? We're going to have games. I'll be there in half-a-sec.'

The big marquee was very cosy after the damp of the outside woods. One end was set apart for girls who wished to be quiet, with a circle of low chairs and stools round an oil-stove, and small tables for books and work. At the other end was a long trestle table spread with playing-cards, dominoes, and draughts, and surrounded by a noisy crowd.

Tibby, shaking off her depression for a while, joined the players; while Lib, less easily comforted, sought the circle round the stove, and curled herself up in a corner at Rowena's feet, her mackintosh thrown aside. 'Where's Grey Edward?' she asked, stroking the bulldog, who lay stretched before the stove, and snuffled lazily at her touch.

'Out,' said The Robin promptly. 'Out searching for another little Alfonso. He goes about now in the hope of meeting Mrs Alf.'

'Out in all this rain?'

'And what he'll be like when he comes in we can't think.'

'He'll be beautiful. He's always beautiful,' murmured The Beaver.

'He's crazy mad,' Opechee retorted. 'Any cat must be who would go out in such weather.'

'We say he must have a dug-out somewhere, and retire to that at night, or when it's very wet,' Rowena laughed. 'I think myself he's probably in one of our barns with our yellow cat. We call her Miss Ginger, and she's a very great friend of Edward's. They really look lovely together, for she's yellow, with deep golden stripes and golden-brown eyes. She shows off his gray beautifully.'

'That's why he goes with her,' Tamakwa explained. 'He likes to look pretty, and he knows he looks extra beautiful when he's with your Miss Ginger.'

'Isn't beautiful! Isn't pretty! And he's just too conceited to live!' The Robin retorted.

'Don't trouble, Robin. He isn't here to hear you, and I'm sure The Beaver's past curing on the subject of Grey Edward's looks,' Miss Helen laughed.

The Robin snorted, and took up her knitting again. Yallani, The Mountain, was busy with her little loom once more, and Rowena with her drawing. Killooleet had a theory-book in her lap. The Owl was poring over a book, as usual; and Aurora, The Dawn, was pretending to do French translation, but was making poor progress. The Bee and The Beaver were working at their gowns again, and Tchikash was puzzling over her crochet. The Rainbow and The Adventurous One, The Gipsy and The Queen, were among the crowd playing 'animal snap,' and grotesque noises came from their end of the tent.

The workers were talking and laughing, but presently all were deep in an animated discussion on the subject of the new Guardian. Miss Helen and Miss Fenton were present, but neither acted in any way as a constraint upon the girls, who talked freely before them. Miss Helen glanced now and then at Tibby Mackenzie, who steadily avoided her eye. Then she looked thoughtfully at Libby. It was plain to any one who looked at Lib closely that she was troubled; she said little, and sat with downcast eyes, stroking Great Britain's huge head till he snored with joy. Uda wondered if Tibby had confessed at home, and if Lib's depression was the result. She had gauged something of the depth of Libby's feeling for her sister, and knew how she would feel such a disclosure.

'Tanpa!' Miss Helen said gently. 'Here just a moment!'

Rowena came and bent over her. 'Yes, Guardian?'

'Will you do something for me?'

'Uda, you know I will. I'll do anything.'

'Well, look at that child—Libby!'

'Yes, there's something wrong with her,' Rowena agreed, in a low tone. 'I saw it too.'

'Couldn't you find out what it is? She isn't as happy as she was. She's more likely to tell you than me.'

'It's only since last night. She was as jolly as anything at the Blue Birds' tea.'

'You hadn't noticed anything wrong before?' This confirmed Miss Helen's idea. If Lib's silence had to do with Tibby's trouble, she would not tell it to Rowena. But it might be something else.

'Well, not really wrong. She looks funny sometimes when we say anything about Tibby and the Guides. I think she's worried over that. She doesn't seem to like Tib being with them, but she won't say why.'

'Perhaps that's it,' the Guardian said thoughtfully.

'I wish you could find out. I hate to see her look like this.'

'Shall I take her over to my tent, and try to make her talk?'

'I wish you would!' Miss Helen's face lit up. 'She won't say anything here before so many. She's very shy. But she might open out to you alone.'

'She's all shut up, like an oyster. I've seen that all along. I don't know whether I can get inside her or not, but I'll try,' Rowena agreed.

She went back to her seat, and worked on at her design for a few minutes. Then she carefully tore the sheet off her sketching-block. 'Any one like to criticise a wonderful and original design of bryony leaves and flowers? Here you are; pass it round! I want a change.—Libby Mackenzie, will you be a sport and do me a kindness?'

Lib looked up quickly. 'I'd like to. What can I do?'

'Sometimes, just for practice, I try portraits. I've drawn Grey Edward and John Bull, and I've tried most of these girls at one time or another, but no one ever lets me try it twice. They find it hard enough to forgive the first time. You're a new subject; may I try to draw you?'

'Why, of course, if you'd like to!' Libby laughed and coloured. 'I don't mind.'

'That's a dear. And you won't become my lifelong enemy when you see the result?'

'Of course not. I don't mind what it's like. You can do me as often as you care to; I don't mind.'

'There's something about her hair that will be awfully difficult,' Tanpa decided, eyeing Libby solemnly, but secretly exulting that she had made her laugh, and determined to do it again. 'But it's rather fascinating too. I like the way it crinkles. There's a very peculiar wavy way it's got—to say nothing of the colour. I'll have to use colour, of course. Oh, bother! My paint-box is in my tent. Will you come over there, Libby? You don't mind a spoonful of rain, do you?'

'Not a scrap. But hadn't you better do the drawing first?'

'No; I'd rather not stop once I've started. Let's go across to my tent and see what we can make of it, and then we'll show the others the result. I couldn't work properly on a figure-subject in this crowd, anyway. Come on! Where's your mack?'

As they went towards the door of the marquee, a shout of laughter greeted them from The Adventurer and The Gipsy, and in under the flap of the tent slipped a sodden little gray figure, every hair standing out in a separate black spike, tail draggled, paws black with mud. Opechee began to jeer; Tamakwa seized a soft duster and began to dry her pet, rubbing him down gently, lifting him to wipe his paws, ruffling his fur so that the under parts should dry, Grey Edward swearing loudly all the time. She put him down at last, still rumbling like a volcano,

and ran to fetch a saucepan and warm a little milk over the stove; while Watanopa brought a whole scone, saved from tea, and presented it by way of comfort. In his excitement over this generosity, Grey Edward forgot his misery, and chewed and drank by turns till he felt a little less chilled and unhappy; then he stretched himself before the stove and began to purr, but presently sat up again and set to work on a mighty and much-needed wash.

'Nasty, dirty, filthy, draggled, muddy object!' jeered The Robin. 'Just look at his tail! It's like a bit of string! And his feet are just caked in mud!'

'Never you mind. He'll be clean again in a few minutes, and then he'll be as beautiful as ever,' said The Beaver.

'Isn't beautiful! He never is! And just now he's hideous!'

'Come on, Libby!' Rowena laughed. 'It will take them half-an-hour to decide whether he's beautiful or not!'

'Now you sit there! I want your profile. Mind you don't touch the canvas!' Tanpa directed, closing the door of the little tent.

'Why not?'

'Try with one finger and see,' laughed The Birch Tree. 'Don't do it just over my bed, though. It lets the rain through if you touch it, you know.'

'Oh, then I won't, of course. I didn't know. I've never lived in a tent.'

'It's good fun. You'd like it. Next time we come here to camp, perhaps you'll come too.'

'Perhaps,' Libby assented, and the shadow crept over her face again.

Rowena saw it plainly. This was not the Libby she intended to try to draw. 'Of course, you'll belong to the Camp Fire by then,' she said deliberately, 'and Tibby will come with the Guides.'

Libby's lips tightened. Perhaps it would be better to explain and have done with it. 'I think maybe—I'll join the Guides too,' she said, with difficulty.

Rowena paused, pencil in hand. 'Whatever for? Lib Mackenzie, you know you prefer the Camp Fire!'

'When did I say so?'

'Why, all the time! Every time you open your mouth! It's written all over you. We've all seen for days that you'd want to come into Camp Potawatomi! And now you go and talk about joining the Guides! What *do* you mean by it?'

Libby's face was quivering, but she held herself tightly. 'I—want to do—the same as Tibby,' she faltered.

'Did Tibby ask you to?' Tanpa demanded, righteous anger in her tone.

'No—oh no! She doesn't mind. But—I hate it—the feeling.' Libby stopped short, her voice breaking, and sat with bent head, her fingers playing nervously with the brown leather fringe on Romany's gown, hanging at her side.

Rowena laid down her block and pencil, and leaning forward, spoke insistently. 'Now, Lib, just tell me all about it! What do you hate? What feeling?'

'I—I can't!' gasped Libby. 'I—you'll make me—I shall cry if I talk about it!'

'Cry, then,' Rowena said cheerfully. 'Have a good howl over it, whatever it is, and you'll feel better.'

Libby looked up at her aghast, with startled, shrinking eyes. She had a horror of crying before any one, and felt she would be disgraced for ever if anybody saw her in tears. And here was this girl, whom she admired so greatly, actually advising her to cry!

'Go on!' Rowena said encouragingly. 'It'll do you good. Goodness me, child! Don't you ever let yourself cry?'—for Libby's amazement was plain enough without words.

'I—no, I don't. I try not to. Not—not when any one's looking, anyway.' She was struggling for self-control, her head bent again.

Rowena looked at her, the corners of her lips twitching. In spite of her sympathy, she found it hard to keep her face straight. 'I do believe it's true, and she doesn't ever cry!' she remarked to the tent-pole. Then with energy, 'You goose, Libby! Why do you try to bottle things up like that? You can't do it; it isn't right. Let it come out; cry if you want to. I'll promise faithfully not to tell a soul! You oughtn't to keep shut up inside yourself like that. It's bad for you. Why, kid, we all have to cry sometimes! It's the way you work things out of your system. Lots of girls enjoy a good cry! I'm not fond of it myself, and Sammy hates it, but we both feel the better for it now and then. Now, Lib, just tell me what's the matter! Never mind if you cry quarts! I'll mop up the floor afterwards! What do you hate, besides crying? What's all this about joining the Guides? What's the feeling you say you hate?'

'That Tib and I are different—that we're going to belong to different things. We've always been together, and there are just the two of us, and—and things seem to be coming in between us.' Libby had begun bravely, but her voice faltered towards the end.

Rowena saw in a moment that there was real trouble here. Throwing aside her block, and with it her half-teasing manner, she sat down on the bed and put her arms tightly round the shaking girl. 'Tell me all about it, Libby,' she said very gently. 'I'm sorry, dear. I didn't understand you were feeling so bad.'

That was too much for Libby. Burying her face in Tanpa's tunic, she broke down and sobbed.

Rowena held her tightly and waited. 'There!' she said triumphantly at last. 'Now you needn't ever be shy and scared of me again. You've been keeping me yards away. Now I'm going to know all about it. You and Tib have always been alone together, haven't you? And now that you're meeting other girls, it worries you to find she's choosing one set of friends and you another. Is that it?'

'Yes,' Libby whispered. 'Yes, Tanpa, that's it. And—and there's more. It bothered me even before we came here. We like different things. We're different altogether. It—it doesn't seem *right*.'

'You poor kid! Of course you're different—as different as you can be. You're bound to like different things. And you've been trying to make yourself like Tibby's things and choose Tibby's friends, so that you could keep with her?'

'Yes!' Libby whispered again. 'It was like that in London. Here it's worse. It comes into everything. I've tried hard, but this about the Guides is the worst of all.'

'Now, Libby, tell me one thing. Does Tib want you to be a Guide for her sake? Does she want you to make yourself like things to please her?'

'No,' Libby confessed unsteadily. 'She doesn't care a scrap; it's only me.'

'It doesn't worry Tibby?'

'Not a bit. She doesn't seem to see it. But it hurts me, Rowena! I feel we're getting more and more different, and—and farther and farther away from one another and from what used to be, and—and I don't know where we'll stop! It frightens me, Tanpa!'

'I wish Miss Helen was here!' Rowena sighed. 'But since she's not, I've got to try to untangle all that for you as well as I can, Libby. You're all mixed up, dear. Of course you're getting more different, and farther from what used to be! There's no need to be frightened about it. It's because you're growing up, and seeing new things and places, and meeting new people, and learning everything. You can't stay inside a shell all your life, and when you come out things are bound to happen. You can't stop growing, one way or another. 'Twouldn't be good for you if you could. You can't walk in a pair of shoes you had two years ago! And you and Tib are born different; any one can see that. I don't know your father and mother, but isn't one of you like each of them?'

'I'm like father. Tib's like mother.'

'I thought so; same in our family! You didn't see it at first, of course, because you were inside your shell, all of you together. But now you'll go on getting more different, as you say. You can't stop that, Libby. Besides, you oughtn't to want to. It's what makes things so interesting, that people are so different. Think how awful it would be if you and Tib lived to be seventy, and had just the same thoughts and wishes all that time! I say, talk about monotony!'

Libby laughed in spite of herself. 'Then you think—it's right—and not anything to worry about? I wondered if it could be right, that first time we saw you in the train. You said something then about you and Sammy doing different things.'

'Did I? Of course it's right. You've only got to get used to the idea, and you'll see how much jollier it is than the other way. But it needn't make you and Tib grow away from one another, Libby! That's quite a different story. You can be, and you ought to be, as good friends and chums, and as close to one another, as ever; and you both ought to care tremendously about each other's interests. That's what you've got to try for—to keep as close to Tibby as ever, even if she's a Guide and you're a Camp Fire Girl.'

'But can I?' Lib asked doubtfully. 'I didn't think that was possible.'

'I know it's possible, for Sammy and I do it. We're as different as we can be; Sammy's nine-tenths a boy, and I'm not. But we're awfully good chums. And you and Tib will be the same. You won't have secrets from one another; though, of course, if you tell her a Camp Fire secret or she tells you one of theirs, you'll keep it as carefully as if it was your own. As a rule, Sam and I don't tell one another camp secrets, but neither of us minds. You won't be jealous of her friends, and her work for badges, and all that she'll be keen on, and she won't be jealous of you. You mustn't, Lib; it will be harder for you than for her. You'll have to try hard, and be awfully generous and pleased with all that pleases her, and then you'll find she's as much your chum as ever, although you're doing different things all the time.'

'It sounds awfully nice,' Libby said wistfully. 'It's what I want, but I didn't think it was possible. I will try, Rowena. Then you don't think I ought to try to be a Guide?'

Rowena laughed—a hearty laugh that had no ridicule in it, but much comfort. 'No more than you ought to try to walk in Sammy's shoes. Lib, you couldn't! Don't worry any more about that. You simply couldn't; it would be wrong—wicked!'

'Wrong?' Libby looked up in startled surprise. 'How could it be wrong? I—I thought—I ought to'——

'Yes, for Tibby's sake, although she hasn't asked you to. But every bit of you belongs to us, Lib, and you know it. You've felt it from the first. You can't go against your whole nature. You've got to—to develop along your own lines! That's really what I want to say, if you know what I mean. For you to squeeze yourself into a Guide's uniform would be like dressing yourself in clothes several sizes too small. You know how bad that would be for you. I don't mean that we're bigger than the Guides; perhaps we're not. But the Guides don't fit *you*; that's the point. Now don't be a silly goose; it's nice of you to think of Tib, of course, but it isn't necessary, and it isn't right. She'll get on all right, and it will be better for her to do it without you. She'll never grow up if she always has you to fall back on. She's got to stand on her own feet, and so have you. I'm telling you the truth—for you to make yourself join the Guides would be wrong. It wouldn't be good for you. You'll find what you want in the Camp Fire; you've got the nature that needs it. The Guides would leave one whole side of you starved, as they would me. But they will suit Tibby, as they do Sammy. And they'll be good chums, just as you and I will be Camp Fire Sisters. But none of that will come in between you and Tibby, unless you let it, Lib. You've got to see to that yourself. I say, I've got a Camp Fire name for you!'

Libby looked up in astonishment. ‘Don’t I have to choose it myself? I’ve been wondering how I ever could!’

‘You may, if you like, of course. You needn’t take mine unless you like it. But often we give a girl her name because we think we know what would suit her. We chose Romany’s name for her because she’s such an out-of-doors kid, and she was awfully pleased with it. And Watanopa, The Adventurer; I chose that for her, and she just jumped at it. And we all christened The Owl, because of the way she pores over books!’

‘And what do you want to call me?’ Lib drew a long breath of deepest relief at the thought that her interest in the Camp Fire need no longer be repressed.

‘You ought to be Witawentin,’ Tanpa said solemnly, but with dancing eyes. ‘It’s in our Indian book of names. The symbol is a tent with several little figures of girls in it. It means “To live together.” That’s your great difficulty, you see; you’ve got to learn to live with Tibby. With other people too, of course; we all have to learn to live properly with the folks round about us. It takes some doing. When you live together in a camp, or a school, or in a tent, or even in a family, you soon find out what it means. Everybody has to do her share, and nobody must grab more than her share, and nobody must shirk, and each must try to keep things pleasant and jolly. “To live together!”—I’ve always thought I’d like it for my name if I could have two, but I couldn’t give up my darling birch trees. I’ll give it to you, if you’ll try to be good enough for it! “Witawentin!” Don’t you think it’s pretty to say?’

Libby repeated the name once or twice. ‘“Witawentin!” Yes, I like it, and I like the meaning. Perhaps I’ll have that for my name, Tanpa. But you won’t tell the others all about it?’

Rowena shook her head. ‘I won’t tell a soul except Miss Helen. She asked me to talk to you, because she saw there was something wrong.’

Libby flushed. ‘Did she? How nice of her! How did she know?’

‘Oh, she always knows! You can’t hide anything from Uda!—not any trouble, anyway. I don’t know what we’ll do without her.’

‘It will be awfully hard for any one to take her place.’

Rowena considered that point of view. ‘So it will. That’s worth thinking about. Thanks for suggesting it, Witawentin! It will be jolly difficult for the new Guardian. I’ll remind the girls of that, and make them be extra nice to her. Now, Libby, you’re going to be jolly again, and quite all right, aren’t you?’

Libby’s face fell grievously. ‘No! I’d forgotten! There’s more the matter, and I don’t know what it is! Oh, Rowena, that’s the worst of all! Tibby’s keeping a secret from me!’

CHAPTER XXII.
TIBBY'S WAY OUT.

'And Tib won't tell you what's the matter? But she's been down twice to the village alone, and each time come home worse than she went?' Rowena said slowly. 'H'm! Looks to me as if our boys might have something to do with it!'

'Ribby and Perks? I never thought of that!'

'Does she know any one else in the village?'

'No, not well. But'——

'If it goes on you'll have to tell your mother,' Rowena said, with decision. 'Oh yes, you'll have to, but not if you can possibly help it. It wouldn't make Tibby love you more—at the time, anyway. But you're the eldest, and you've got to look after her. You can't have her getting into trouble in the village, and not telling any one what's up. But wait a day or two, Lib. Perhaps she'll tell you of her own accord, or she may tell your mother. But, if you don't mind, I'll tell the Guardian just what you've told me. Uda's awfully sensible, and as kind as kind. She'll tell you whether to speak to your mother or not.'

'Oh, please do tell her!' Libby said gratefully. 'That really would help, I do believe.'

'I expect Tib has got into trouble of some kind, and doesn't want to own up,' Rowena said wisely. 'I know what Sammy's like at times, and Tib strikes me as Sammy Number Two. Don't worry about her keeping it a secret, Lib. I expect she wants to tell you badly enough, but doesn't like. Maybe you'll have to help her. But give her a day or two, and just be extra nice to her in the meantime. If she's really in a hole of any kind she'll appreciate a little extra niceness! Now get on your mack; I'll rout out Sam, and we'll take you two home.'

She had hoped for some enlightenment during their walk down the road under the dripping sycamores, but gained none. Tib talked away to Sammy about the Guides and their badges, and repeated for Lib's benefit the bickering which had been going on between The Beaver and The Robin over what Opechee called Grey Edward's 'disgusting condition,' but there was a look in her eyes all the time which confirmed what Lib had told, and Rowena sought the Guardian in her tent at bed-time and unburdened herself on the subject of both the girls.

'Such an idea, Uda! She was trying to make herself into another Tibby!'

'Poor kiddy!' Miss Helen laughed pitifully. 'What did you say to her, Tanpa?'

'Oh, reams! I don't know what I said, but I think I made her see it.'

Miss Helen nodded. She had not chosen her Torch-Bearer for nothing. 'Lib will be grateful to you all her life. But I wish I could have heard you!' she laughed. 'I'd have enjoyed it!'

'I wish you'd been there! You'd have done it far better than I could!' The Birch Tree said ruefully. 'And what about Tibby, Uda?'

'Oh, I know all about Tibby!' the Guardian said quietly. 'I knew there was trouble there.'

'You know? Oh, I'm glad!' There was quick relief in Tanpa's voice. 'That will be all right, then!'

Miss Helen coloured and laughed. 'It's very nice of you to have such faith in me, Tanpa! I'm sure I've not deserved it. But as for Tibby'——

'Oh, but you have!' Rowena assured her warmly. 'You put everything straight! If you're looking after Tib, I know she'll be all right. Is it very bad, Guardian? I'm not asking what she's done, of course, but I was thinking of Libby. I'm rather keen on her after to-night.'

The Guardian nodded. Her dark eyes did not miss much that went on in the camp, and she had long since seen Libby's frank admiration for Rowena. It was with intention that she had

taken the chance to throw them more together. 'Tib is thoughtless and hasty, and she has got herself into an awkward corner. I'm hoping she'll get herself out again if she's left alone. That will be better for her than being pulled out by Libby or any of us.'

'Yes, of course. And do you think she'll manage it?'

'I'm hoping!' said the Guardian, and sent The Birch Tree off to bed somewhat comforted.

To Libby that evening's talk had brought an immense sense of relief. Her parents, understanding her reserved nature, had never forced her to an open expression of feeling, and, perhaps not very wisely, had allowed her to repress all her deepest emotions. So Libby, under stress of any very strong feeling, had always fled to hide herself, and had never unburdened herself freely even to her mother. But Rowena, scarcely two years her senior, had ruthlessly refused her any such consideration, and after the first shock was over, it was an immense relief to feel some one understood, and had not laughed at her. It eased the burden she had been trying to carry alone, and now that her mind was freed from the imagined necessity of resisting the instincts drawing her to Rowena and the Camp Fire, Lib would have been quite happy if it had not been for Tibby's mysterious trouble. Even so, she was happier than she had been since the first night of the camp, when they had watched the hoisting of the flag, and Tib's preference for the Guides had become plain.

Libby was thoughtful as she helped her father to weed next morning between the showers, and Tib was still very sober-faced. In spite of drizzly mist, the campers had come to do their usual weeding before breakfast, and The Dawn and The Owl, The Bee and The Beaver, had worked hard, mackintoshes covering their tunics; this had been a Camp Fire morning, but the Guides had done their share of the weeding, taking alternate days, and their corner of the garden beds and paths showed much improvement.

After a time Libby saw Tib slip away and disappear. Their father was transplanting seedlings in another part of the garden, so did not notice that she had gone. Lib, much troubled, wondered if she ought to say anything. Had Tibby gone on another mysterious visit to the village? Would she come back more gloomy than ever? If so, it could be nothing to do with the boys, for on a Thursday morning they must be in school. She decided to do nothing, however, until she had consulted Rowena again. It was a great relief to have some one to whom to turn.

If Tibby did not go at once to her mother in her present trouble, it was only because Miss Helen had discovered her secret by accident. When one grown person knew all about it, Tib could not bring herself to confide the story to another unnecessarily, and since Miss Helen knew, and had been sympathetic to some extent, Tib turned to her.

She went to the deserted camp in the hope of finding the Guardian there, for they knew by experience that she often stayed in her tent for a while, writing letters after the girls had gone off to school. The announcement of her engagement had meant a great deal of correspondence, and there was only quietness for the Guardian when her charges were away.

As Tibby had hoped, she was sitting in her little tent at a low table, writing busily, the canvas doorway of the tent wide open to give light and air. She looked up quickly to see who it was that had braved the rain and Great Britain, and showed no surprise at sight of Tib.

She laid down her pen and stretched out a welcoming hand. 'Come along, Tibby! I've been hoping you would come.'

Tib dropped on a stool at her side, and spoke hurriedly, without looking up. 'I want to tell you, Miss Helen. I—I know how awful it was of me to tell the boys about your meeting; I've been thinking about it. I've done what I could to make up for it; truly I have. But I'm afraid it won't be any good. That Ribby's such a pig!'

'What have you done to try to help matters?' Miss Helen asked quietly.

'I went to see them yesterday, and asked them not to come and watch the meeting.'

'Ah!' The Guardian's grave face brightened. 'And was it a hard thing to do, Tibby?'

Tibby quivered. 'Jolly hard!' she gasped. 'I—I didn't want to do it a scrap.'

'Yet I'm very glad you went. You were right; it was the first thing to do. And what did the boys say?'

'They were horrid. They wouldn't promise. They wouldn't say what they'd do. And—and they said things again!'

'That's a way boys have,' Uda said, smiling a little. 'So they wouldn't promise not to come and watch the meeting?'

'No. Ribby's so frightfully keen on it. But—but they told me I could ask you to change the date!'

'Did they know I had heard all about it already?'

'I don't think so. I didn't tell them.'

The Guardian nodded, seeing clearly Ribby's intention of forcing Tib to confession, if he must lose the chance she had put in his way. 'And do you think they will come, Tibby? Or had we better change the day? But I'm afraid we can't. And if we did, we should certainly have to tell the girls the reason. I couldn't change it so suddenly without explaining why.'

'I guess they'll come,' Tib said miserably. 'Ribby's been just a pig about it all.'

'Now, Tibby, that's not fair! I don't know Ribby, but I really must say a word for him!' Miss Helen said severely. 'Apparently he has been wanting this chance for a year, and it's natural enough, since he must have heard so much about the Camp Fire from Rowena. No other girl has her family living so near. It is not to be wondered at that her brothers are curious. Now you come and give him the very information he has wanted for so long; he knows perfectly well you were wrong to tell him, and he will be acting dishonourably if he takes advantage of your foolishness, and yet he wants to see our meeting very badly indeed. Don't you see what a tremendous temptation you have put in his way? Think how hard it will be for him on Friday evening to stay quietly at home! Don't you think you were asking a little too much when you went to him yesterday? You've put him in a very hard position. For myself, I sympathise with Ribby, and if he "said things" to you, I don't blame him. I'm afraid at his age I'd have done it myself.'

Tib sat with bent head. 'I didn't see—how bad it was—for him,' she faltered.

'As for what he will do on Friday, that depends, of course, on how strong his sense of honour is. It may bring him safely through the temptation, or it may fail him. *I* think you ought to apologise to Ribby, and if there is any way in which you can make it less hard for him, I think you ought to take it.'

Tib looked up with startled eyes. 'How could I? What could I do?'

'Suppose—just suppose!—we could tell the girls all about it, and get them to invite the boys as visitors?'

'Oh! But they wouldn't, Miss Helen. That would be awfully fine! But they never would.'

'I can't say, of course. We'd have to ask them to-night. It would mean two things, Tibby. In the first place, you would have to tell them what you have done, and beg them to get you out of your difficulty.'

Tib looked up again, her eyes frightened this time. 'I couldn't!' she gasped.

'You'd have to try. I would help you out, of course, but you'd have to be willing they should know.'

'Couldn't you ask them to ask the boys without—without saying why?'

'Now, how could I, Tibby? You know that wouldn't be possible. They would need a reason, and a good one, too. They might be generous enough to do it for the sake of helping a girl out of a difficulty; there is no real objection to our having visitors, as you know, and I would agree, if they would. But we have never invited any boys.'

‘Rowena wouldn’t agree!’ Tibby said dolefully. ‘Because of what the boys told us, you know.’

‘What do you mean?’

So Tibby told that story, ending gloomily, ‘And Rowena said Ribby would never see a meeting if she could help it.’

The Guardian laughed. ‘Then we must look for opposition from her. But I think I can manage Tanpa. The question is, are you willing to confess and make a real effort to put matters right, Tibby?’

‘I—don’t want to, Miss Helen.’

‘Do you expect to be friends with the boys again when Friday is over?’

‘No,’ Tib said brokenly. ‘They’ll hate me either way.’

‘Yes, I think you’re right. They’ll blame you more than themselves if they do come to the meeting, if only by way of excuse for their own weakness, and that won’t make them feel particularly friendly towards you. On the other hand, if they resist the temptation and stay away, they certainly won’t feel very loving towards you, and you can hardly wonder. Do you value their friendship at all?’

‘I’m awfully sorry about it. I did like them. We never knew any boys before.’

‘Well, it seems to me that is the second thing it would mean if you persuaded the girls to invite the boys to the meeting; Ribby would be so much obliged to you for sparing him the need to decide between right and wrong, and so glad to get to a meeting at last, and without feeling he had acted dishonourably, that he might forget what you have done, and’——

‘And make it up again! Oh, I wish he would!’ Tib cried yearningly. ‘Oh, Miss Helen, perhaps they wouldn’t hate me for ever then! Oh, do you think I could do it?’

‘I am sure you could!’ Uda said promptly. ‘You have only to make up your mind to do it.’

‘But the girls will all hate me! And—and Libby will feel awfully bad,’ Tib faltered.

‘The girls may be annoyed at first, and Libby will certainly feel hurt, because she could never have done such a thing herself, Tibby dear;’ and Tibby reddened in shame. ‘But they will realise you are doing your best in trying to repair the wrong you have done, and they will like you better if you confess honestly and say you are sorry. It always helps. And after it is over you must join the Guides, and be very careful to remember that a Guide’s honour can be trusted. You will have to be very careful on that point.’

‘I used to say Libby was too particular,’ Tib said shakily. ‘I feel as if we couldn’t be, now.’

‘I don’t really think you can. But you must be very careful when you are a Guide, Tibby. It would hurt them all terribly if you disgraced them.’

‘Do you suppose they’ll have me after—after this?’

‘I think they will. Then you’ll do it, Tibby dear? If I call the Camp Fire together, you will be brave and tell them all about it?’

Tibby sat with bent head for a long moment. Then she looked up wistfully. ‘Will you help me, please? I—do want to, Miss Helen.’

CHAPTER XXIII.
TIBBY'S CONFESSION.

'A business meeting to-night? Whatever's that for, Tanpa?' Renée looked up from the bed where she sat in her tent changing her wet shoes.

'And a ceremonial to-morrow!' Romany added, staring at Rowena, who had just given them a message from the Guardian. 'Some business turned up that Uda wants to give us notice of?'

'Perhaps she's decided not to get married, after all,' laughed Opechee.

'Some business, I suppose; she didn't say. She just told me as soon as I got into camp to pass the word round for an important business meeting in the barn directly after tea.'

'Rummy! It must be something sudden!'

'I've an idea,' said The Gipsy. 'Aurora and Kokokoho are going to qualify as Fire-Makers to-morrow, and they haven't told us the story of their heroines yet. I guess Uda thinks they'd better get them done, and say their poems, before the meeting, to save time.'

'Who are their famous women, do you know?' Tanpa began to brush and replait her chestnut locks.

'The Owl's is Louisa Alcott—"Jo" out of *Little Women*. She's been reading up her life,' said The Queen.

'That should be jolly interesting, and quite a change. How like The Owl! She was sure to choose something booky. And what about Dawn?'

'Oh, hers is Agnes Weston, who helps the sailors, you know,' said Romany.

'We've had some awfully jolly heroines. I should think these two will be quite good. There can't be many famous women left! Hard lines on you when your turn comes, Queen!'

'I say!' The Beaver put her head in at the door of the tent. 'Did any of you take off Grey Edward's collar?'

'Goodness me, no! You always do it! Why?'

'Why should we, Beaver? What's up?'

'I wouldn't touch the dirty, filthy little beast!' and The Robin pretended to shudder.

'I saw you cuddling him yesterday!' cried Renée triumphantly.

'I thought there was nobody looking!' Opechee confessed, with a laugh.

'Well, then, his collar's lost—and his bell—and his identity disc, and everything, and they cost half-a-crown!' wailed The Beaver. 'I've asked everybody in both camps! I thought perhaps you'd hidden it to tease me, Robin! He's just come walking in out of the woods all naked!'

'Disgusting! I'm surprised at him!' The Robin said severely.

'He must have dropped it, or had it pulled off as he crawled through a hedge. Or else it's been stolen from him,' Romany suggested.

'Or he's given it to Miss Ginger for a keepsake,' Rowena laughed. 'I'll ask Miss Ginger next time I write home, Beaver.'

'We'll have to get him a new one if it doesn't turn up. We can't have him wandering all over the village and Downs without his name on him,' Tamakwa said in distress.

'Without a stitch of clothing on him! Certainly not! We can't allow that,' Opechee agreed. 'Let's have a subscription to buy him a new one! I'm sure Miss Ginger will subscribe!'

'And Great Britain would love to give twopence!' The Gipsy added.

'You'll all have to help, if it doesn't turn up. I haven't got half-a-crown to spend on Edward!' The Beaver said decidedly. 'He's the camp mascot. You'll have to dress him among

you!'

'Poor little Grey! Doesn't she like him two-and-sixpence worth?' The Robin mocked. 'I thought you'd do anything for him because he was so beautiful?'

'He looks *awfully* undressed lying there before the fire with nothing round his neck!' Tamakwa said mournfully.

'I say, I'm dying for my tea! Never mind Edward's wardrobe just now,' said Rowena. 'I wonder if we could help Watanopa and Yallani?'

'Hurry them up, you mean!' The Gipsy laughed.

They all hurried out to give a helping hand to The Adventurer and The Mountain, who were struggling with the oil-stove in the kitchen tent. The undressed mascot lay before the stove, rolling blissfully in the heat and getting in everybody's way, quite careless of the distress his bare neck was causing; so The Beaver was ordered to sit in a corner and nurse him, lest he should be trampled on, an occupation very pleasing to herself, but not so satisfactory to Grey Edward, who had been enjoying the heat, and swore noisily when dragged away from it. The Beaver sat caressing his ears and ruffling his neck, and presently he subsided into her lap, but still gave an angry rumble occasionally, on principle.

'He uses terrible bad language, does Little Grey!' murmured The Robin, as she filled the tea-pot.

Tea was served at last at one end of the big mess-tent, while the Guides took possession of the other, and Samanthy and Cicely, camp orderly for the day, brought in the tea made by Vera, their patrol-leader.

'The Guardian's keeping one eye on the door,' Rowena murmured to Rose, as the meal proceeded. 'I wonder whom she's looking for? Everybody's here!'

'Perhaps she's expecting Edward's collar to come walking in,' The Rainbow laughed.

'Hi, Tib Mackenzie! Come and sit by me and have another tea!' Samanthy hailed Tibby as soon as she appeared in the doorway.

A look of relief crossed Tib's face, but her eyes were still troubled as she slipped into a place on the form, refusing offers of bread-and-butter or a drink from Sammy's cup. 'I've had my rations,' she explained gravely. 'I mustn't eat up yours.'

'What's the matter with you? What's up?' Samanthy demanded severely. 'You look as solemn as an owl. Don't let Koko over there hear me say it, though!'

'She'll say you're making fun of her symbol,' Phyllis remarked.

'Got toothache? 'Nother headache?' Samanthy inquired of grave-eyed Tib.

'No. Don't tease, Sam. I'm all right. Perhaps I'm worried. Aren't you ever?'

'Oh, often and often!' Samanthy asked no more questions, knowing from experience that it was awkward to give explanations at times. She plunged into the story of Edward's lost collar, and Tib listened gravely.

Libby had found a corner beside The Silver Birch Tree, but she said nothing until Rowena asked a question in a low tone. 'Well, Witawentin? How's everything?'

'Very queer,' Libby responded cautiously. 'Tibby's worse than ever, Rowena. I'm going to tell mother if she's not better by to-morrow.'

'How do you mean, worse than ever?'

'So awfully solemn. She hardly speaks to me when we're alone. She tries to pretend she's quite all right and lively when mother's there, and mother hasn't seen yet that she's only putting it on. But I can see it, and I can't stand it much longer.'

'The Guardian says she knows all about it. I meant to tell you this morning, but you didn't come along.'

'Mother told us not to, because of the rain. Miss Helen *knows*?' Libby looked up in amazement.

‘She says so. I told you she always knew. She said last night she knew what was wrong with Tibby, and she hoped it would come all right. Don’t worry, Witawentin! Uda’ll put her oar in if she sees it’s needed.’

‘I’m glad she knows.’ Libby’s face cleared. ‘But I do wish Tibby would tell *me*! I don’t see why she doesn’t.’

‘Most likely you will when you know all about it,’ Rowena said comfortingly.

‘You’re having a meeting to-night, aren’t you? Miss Helen was talking to Tibby this morning, and she said she’d like us both to come to it. Why do you suppose she wanted us?’

‘I can’t imagine.’ Tanpa knit her brows. ‘She hasn’t said what the meeting’s for. We think perhaps it’s to hear two Fire-Makers’ stories of heroines, to save time to-morrow. Maybe she thinks it would be nice for you to hear them too. Some day you’ll have to choose your heroine and tell her story yourself, if you want to be a Fire-Maker.’

‘Of course I do! I shall choose Flora Macdonald—or David Livingstone’s wife—or Mary Moffat; they were splendid.’

‘Some difference between them and Flora Macdonald!’ Rowena laughed. ‘Everybody’s finished. Now for the meeting! Uda looks mysterious; I wonder what it’s all about.’

As the girls donned caps and mackintoshes and ran through the rain to the barn within the Woody Dean fence, Miss Helen called Tib to her side and walked with her, talking earnestly.

Rowena and Libby looked at one another, then ran on with the rest. ‘I believe your Tibby has done something she shouldn’t, and Miss Helen has discovered it somehow, and is trying to get her to own up, Witawentin. That’s what it looks like to me,’ said Rowena.

‘I wish she’d tell me all about it!’ Libby sighed.

The barn was big and shadowy even in daylight. At one end a quantity of hay was stored, but the rest of the bare floor had been swept very clean by The Beaver and The Bee, The Robin and The Rainbow, in preparation for the Friday evening meeting, which would obviously need to be held under cover. When the Guardian and Tibby arrived, the girls were awaiting them, squatting on the ground in a big circle, all curious to know why they had been called together. Lib Mackenzie was sitting between Tanpa and Killooleet, but Miss Helen called her to her side.

‘I want you, Libby dear. Sit here, near me and Tib.’

Much mystified, Libby obeyed, and looked questioningly at her sister; but Tib’s head was bent, and she would not look up. Suddenly Libby was seized with a new fear. Could the meeting have anything to do with Tibby? Was it possible? What could Tibby have done?

She drew nearer to her sister, and slipped a hand through her arm. ‘Tibby *dear*! What is the matter?’ she whispered.

Tib quivered, but did not answer, save by a hasty shake of the head, and Libby waited anxiously.

Miss Helen, sitting on the ground like the rest, addressed the meeting. ‘Camp Fire Sisters! I have several little bits of business to put before you to-night, but one is serious, and we will take that first.—Now, Tibby dear!’

The girls looked startled, and Lib’s eyes, as she looked up at Miss Helen, were aghast and frightened. But Uda had talked much with Tibby to-day, and knew what she was about.

Tib, white-faced, but eager, stumbled to her feet, and her words came in a torrent as she faced the curious girls. ‘I’ve done something awful!’ she panted. ‘I know you’ll hate me, but I want you all to know. It’s been making me feel awfully bad. But, really and truly, I didn’t think how mean it was—not till afterwards. I only meant it for a joke. I see now, of course, but I didn’t stop to think in time. Then Miss Helen came along, and she made me see it—and I knew at once what the boys thought.’

‘The boys!’ Rowena jerked, with startled eyes.

All the girls were staring and waiting impatiently for facts. Only Libby sat with bent head, her shoulders quivering.

Miss Helen's arm crept round her. 'It will be all right now, Libby!' she whispered.

'The boys, Sammy Stanley's brothers, are wild to see one of your ceremonial meetings,' Tibby stumbled on, 'but Rowena would never tell them when there was to be one. I knew they wanted to come, and—and so, when you arranged one for to-morrow night, I—I told them, just for fun.'

'*Tibby!*' Lib's voice rang out, sore and hurt and reproachful. No girl who was present at that meeting, and who heard her tone and saw her dismayed, ashamed face, as she looked up at her sister, and then hurriedly across at Rowena, ever dreamed of suggesting that Libby had known of Tib's betrayal.

Tibby sank down in a little heap, her confession made. She hid her face, her shoulders shaken with sobbing. For one moment Libby looked at her, and Rowena, across the barn, watched Libby anxiously. Then Lib's arms went round Tibby, as she cried reproachfully, 'Oh, Tib, how could you? And why didn't you tell me? You must have been feeling awfully bad! Oh, Tibby *dear*!'

Tibby clung to her, crying brokenly; and, unless Rowena was mistaken, Libby cried a little too, though her face was buried in Tib's curls, and no one else was looking at her. The Guardian had risen and claimed their attention.

'Girls! Tibby has told you honestly what she has done. I will finish the story for her. The boys received her information as you would expect any honourable boys to do, and showed her plainly their opinion of her; she says they "said things," which I can quite believe.' She looked at Rowena, who laughed. 'Then I came along and heard the whole story. I would like to emphasise two points. Tibby was more thoughtless and mischievous and hasty than really treacherous; she did not stop to think of that side of the question. When she did think, she realised how dishonourable her action had been; but at first it appeared to her merely as a joke, to tease Rowena and Sammy, and gratify the boys. I do assure you that is the case. When she realised what she had done, she did her best to put matters right. She went to the boys again, and begged them not to come and watch the meeting. It wasn't an easy thing to do, girls. The boys "said things" again, and apparently quite pointedly. I don't blame them, of course; they were in an awkward position, and they were very angry with her. But I want you to know that it called for courage on her part to face them again; she was doing her very best to repair the wrong she had done. I want you to forgive her. She has had a sore lesson; she is very sorry; and she is going to join the Guides, and will be very careful to remember that "a Guide's honour can be trusted." Their law will help her, and she will not fail in this way again. I want every girl present to keep what she has heard to herself. There is no need for the story to be known to the Guides. I shall, of course, tell it to Madam, for it is necessary she should know all about her girls, but I don't want it to reach the girls themselves.—Rowena, you won't tell Samanthy?'

'Of course not, Uda. I think we ought to keep it to ourselves. But what about the boys?' Tanpa was frowning in dismay. 'Did they promise not to come?'

'They wouldn't promise. Do you think they'll come?'

Rowena's frown deepened. 'I don't know. No, I don't really think they will, when it comes to the bit. Ribby will feel it would be a low kind of thing to do. But he's awfully keen on getting to a meeting. It is rotten for them, Uda! He'll find it awfully hard to stop away!'

'Yes, I feel very sorry for the boys. I suppose, girls, we couldn't be generous and send them an invitation to the meeting?' Miss Helen put the suggestion tentatively. 'It would be rather a nice thing to do. It would save them the difficulty of deciding between their wishes and their sense of right and wrong,' she urged, as the girls looked at one another, some with

raised eyebrows, some amused, some doubtful. Rowena pursed her lips and said nothing. 'And it would show you had forgiven Tibby, and would make it easier for them to forgive her too. Don't you think it would be rather "sporting"? There is no real reason why we should not have visitors; and the Guides will be there. Come, girls! To get another girl out of a difficulty, won't you stretch a point? I am willing; and if I don't mind appearing dressed up before the boys, I am sure none of you need! Tib is very anxious we should let them come. Won't you be generous? I propose that we invite these two boys and the Guides to the early part of the meeting, to see our ceremonies; then we will ask them all to retire before we get to business and the discussion of the new Guardian.'

'That's a fine idea, Uda!' The Rainbow said eagerly. 'I'll second that! I'd like to help Tib out of a hole. She's a monkey, but I don't believe she meant it badly.'

Libby gave her a grateful look, and had a warm corner in her heart for Nyoda ever afterwards.

A murmur of agreement rose from the girls. The Guardian looked at Rowena. 'I would like the invitation to be unanimous. Has any one any objection?—Tanpa, what do you say?'

The Birch Tree looked up. 'I don't want them to come,' she said frankly. 'I don't think they deserve it. They—they made fun of us to Lib and Tib before we knew them, Uda.'

'I know. I've heard about it. But it was only a joke, Tanpa.'

'Yes; but they oughtn't to joke about things that mean so much to us.'

'Can't you be generous too, and forgive them as well as Tibby? They will be less inclined to joke when they know more, I think. At present it probably seems half a game to them. Let them come and see how much in earnest we are, and I don't think they'll make a joke of it again.'

Rowena sighed. 'Ribby's a pig, and I said he should never see a meeting if I could help it! But because it's to please Libby, and she's going to be our Sister, I'll agree, Guardian. But I don't think they deserve it!'

Libby looked across at her, her face alight with relief.

'Thank you so much, Rowena!'

'I'll do it for you, but I wouldn't for them. Don't let Ribby think I agreed to please him, Uda! I'm only doing it under protest!'

'I will explain that carefully,' the Guardian promised, a little smile twitching at her lips. 'I shall take the invitation to the boys myself. I am glad you are willing, girls. It is the kindest thing to do. Now we will forget all about the trouble. Let it disappear from our minds as completely as our old names do when we burn them in the Council Fire. And that reminds me that it might be well if our two new Fire-Makers would tell us their stories of heroines now. No doubt we shall have plenty to talk about to-morrow round the Fire.—Dawn! Kokokoho! Who will lead?'

'Uda, there's one thing I'd like to propose first!' said The Birch Tree eagerly. 'Couldn't we receive Libby as a member to-morrow? She thinks they're coming to school at half-term, so couldn't she belong and come to meetings and make friends?'

Libby looked up, her face radiant. 'How awfully nice of you, Tanpa!'

'It's only common-sense. We'd like to feel you belong.'

'Would you like to be one of us, Libby?' The Guardian turned to her with a smile.

'Oh, I would, please, Miss Helen!'

'Then learn the Law, and be prepared to promise to keep it to-morrow.'

'I've been trying already,' Lib said shyly.

Then the girls listened critically, but with interest, as The Dawn and The Owl told of their chosen heroines. When the stories were over, Miss Helen hurried away to give the invitation to the boys on her way to the school, where she wished to have a talk with her sister before

returning to supper in camp. The girls in the barn crowded round Libby, welcoming her warmly as a member; and Tib, very subdued and contrite, but much relieved, sought Rowena and Rose, and thanked them shyly for their share in the decision.

'I never meant it badly, really,' she pleaded again. 'I only meant to tease, and—and I thought it would please the boys. But they weren't pleased a bit; they were horrid!'

'I don't know the gentlemen, but I'm jolly well sorry for them, Tib Mackenzie. You put them in a nasty hole, and I don't blame them for anything they said,' The Rainbow assured her.

'What are you two talking about? Uda said that was all to be done with, as if it was burned with fire,' Tanpa said brusquely. 'It's gone—disappeared for ever, and that's the end of it. So don't you forget it, any of you!'

'It's awfully nice of you! And you won't tell the Guides?' Tibby asked wistfully. 'Are you sure it's quite fair not to tell them? I don't *want* Sammy to know!' She was deeply anxious that the Guides should *not* know, but her newly awakened conscience was tender, and she was not quite easy on the point.

'We can't tell things we've forgotten!' Rowena said briefly.

'Nobody will tell Sammy anything, Tib,' Rose assured her.

Tibby drew a long breath of relief. She looked anxiously at her sister, only half-reassured by Libby's first embrace.

Lib's hand slipped through her arm again. 'We ought to go home now.'

'And we must wash-up and get supper. Who's cook to-night?' asked Rowena.

'I am,' said Watanopa. 'I'm going to make some scones for Little Grey, because he's lost his collar.'

'And I'm going to stick up a subscription list, to get him a new one,' The Beaver added. 'He'll catch cold going about undressed in all this rain.'

'More likely he'll be stolen by some one and made into a muff. He'd make a beautiful muff,' jeered The Robin. 'I'm always expecting to see him come home without his fur. Then he *would* look undressed!'

'Then you do admit he's beautiful?' cried Tamakwa instantly.

'Oh, well, blind people might think so, perhaps! He's soft, anyway!' The Robin laughed.

'I'd like to see any one catch Little Grey if he didn't want to be caught!' said Yallani. 'Come on back to camp! I'm going to stew some fruit for supper. Come and help to cut it up, Killooleet!'

'And Tchikash and Tumaga shall dry for me while I wash,' said The Gipsy; and they all sped away to get to work.

CHAPTER XXIV.
LIBBY JOINS THE CAMP FIRE.

It was one thing to talk to Tibby Mackenzie in the cycle-shed, and quite another to receive Miss Helen Robinson in the drawing-room. Ribby and Perks knew her by sight, of course, and she knew them, but they had never met, and the boys were awkward and shy in her presence.

Ribby, indeed, was distinctly anxious. Had she come to 'row' them because of their refusal to give Tibby the promise she had asked? Or had Rowena and Sammy enlisted her sympathy, and had she come to bring them to book for their teasing? They knew her to be the Guardian of the Camp Fire, so guessed at once that Tib had made her confession.

Miss Helen knew enough of girls to understand boys fairly well. She saw that Ribby was uneasy and feeling guilty, and, though sorely tempted to keep him in suspense, she was kind enough to ease his mind at once, since she could not explain her errand without doing so.

She gave her invitation from the Camp Fire Girls for the following evening, and Ribby's face filled with relief, then lit up. 'I say, how awfully jolly decent of them! That will be just topping! We're wild to see a meeting, but Weena wouldn't hear of it.'

'Jolly fine!' added Perks.

'But, I say, Miss Robinson!' Ribby added, awkward, but very much in earnest, 'there's one thing I would like you to know. We weren't really coming to-morrow night on the quiet, as she meant us to, you know.'

'No?' Miss Helen said quietly. 'I am glad to hear it. I rather thought you wouldn't. Rowena thought you wouldn't, too.'

'We'd arranged with a fellow to go back from school with him, and not get home till supper-time,' Ribby explained eagerly. 'Just so that—well' — —

Miss Helen nodded. 'It would have been difficult to stay away when the time came,' she said.

'I say, you do understand!' Ribby said admiringly. 'I really felt I couldn't answer for myself if I was here at the time of the meeting, so I thought I'd better be somewhere else. That was it.'

'I quite see that. I think you were very wise. But I have something else to say to you, Ribby;' and she spoke to them seriously of Tibby, trying to pave the way for future friendship, assuring them earnestly that Tibby had acted only from mischief, and had repented as soon as she understood what she had done, and explaining how much it had cost her to seek them out and be repulsed. 'You can hardly understand what an ordeal that could be to a girl. It called for courage and a real desire to atone. You know how you received her effort,' she said severely.

Ribby flushed. 'I'm sorry. I didn't understand. Will you make it all right with her, please?'

'Oh, I think you'd better do that for yourselves!' Miss Helen laughed. 'And Rowena asked me very particularly to explain that it was only for Tib's sake, and because she is so fond of Libby, that she agreed to your coming to-morrow. She doesn't think you deserve it, but was generous enough to give up her own feelings and fall in with our wishes for her friends' sake.'

Ribby laughed, quite understanding, and followed her to the door with dancing, mischievous eyes. 'All the same, it was jolly decent of her, considering!' he admitted.

Little was said between Libby and Tib on the subject of Tibby's failure in honour. They walked home with arms entwined, and Rowena went with them, and talked of the Camp Fire and the next night's meeting to Libby all the way. During supper they told their mother of Louisa Alcott and the soldiers, and Agnes Weston and the sailors, and of the invitation to

Libby; and Lib took her family's advice as to what dress she should wear for the meeting, since she could not have a khaki gown yet.

'Blue muslin or green linen would look so funny among them all! I'd show up so!' she argued.

'Yes, you'd look just like the leopard in the *Just So Stories* before he got his spots!' laughed Tibby.

'You would look rather conspicuous,' her father agreed. 'What about that pretty frock you used to wear at home on Sundays?'

Lib nodded thoughtfully. 'That would be better. I wouldn't feel such a sight, anyway.'

'But you'll never look like an Indian maiden, you know,' her mother added.

'No; isn't it silly? They're all more or less dark but me. Rowena's not dark, of course, but her hair is brown. I shall feel an awful sight.'

'Oh, don't worry over that!' her father laughed. 'It won't hurt Camp Potawatomi to have one red-haired girl in it!'

But as Lib and Tibby were undressing for bed Tib said shyly, 'I wanted frightfully to tell you all about it, Lib, but I—was afraid to, and that's the truth! I knew all along how awful it would seem to you.'

Libby paused in brushing out her hair. 'Tib, tell me next time, however awful it is!' she pleaded. 'I won't say anything, no matter what it is, if you'll only tell me! I'll only try to help you to find the way out. But do tell me, Tib! It hurts me awfully to feel you've got a secret from me.'

'I will!' Tibby said fervently. 'It's hateful keeping things to yourself! I say, though, isn't Miss Helen a dear? I wish she was Guide-Mistress instead of Madam! I'm rather frightened of *her*!'

'I wish she could go on being our Guardian! I don't wonder all the girls feel desperate about losing her. I hope her captain knows how lucky he is!'

Libby, a little shy and very nervous, sought Rowena in her tent as she was dressing for the meeting the following night. She went first with Tibby as far as the barn, and there at the door they met the boys.

At sight of them Tib shrank back, but Ribby came forward hastily, anxious to ease his conscience. 'I say, Tib, I'm sorry!' he said honestly. 'Miss Robinson says I made things rotten for you. Forget all about it, will you? And I say! Take us in and show us what to do!'

'The place is full of girls—packs of 'em,' Perks added. 'We heard 'em chattering. Little me's shy!'

Libby laughed. 'Tib will look after you. Oh, just look at this!' she cried, as they turned away.

Pinned on the barn door was a big sheet of paper, with names inscribed upon it. 'It's Edward Grey's subscription list for his new collar!' Tib exclaimed, and they read the list of donors eagerly.

'His Bestest Friend' gave sixpence; 'His Worstest Enemy,' in writing suspiciously like The Robin's, gave one farthing; 'The Widow of Alfonso, Esquire,' put down her name for a halfpenny—'Awfully generous of her!' laughed Tibby. 'I believe that's Sammy!'

'Yes, that's certainly our Sam's scrawl,' Perks agreed.

'Miss Ginger' gave threepence; 'From One Adventurer to Another,' in Watanopa's writing, gave twopence; 'One Who admires his Wandering Habits,' in the same writing, added another penny; 'One Who thinks him VERY Beautiful!' gave sixpence, and was later discovered, with much joy and much triumph on the part of The Beaver, to be Miss Helen; 'Great Britain' gave three-farthings; and 'All the Guides, per Madam,' sent the result of a subscription all round the camp, tenpence halfpenny.

The list was still open, and Ribby promptly produced a stump of pencil and scribbled, 'To an Ugly Old Tom-Cat, from a Friend,' and put down his name for a penny.

'Little me must have a go too!' Perks laughed, and put down a halfpenny, signing himself, 'One Who doesn't like the Brute, but is always meeting him about the Village.' 'I nearly ran over him t'other day,' he added. 'I just missed the tip of his tail by an inch. He was stalking down the main street on Sunday afternoon as if he owned the village, and the place was full of motors and bikes and carriages. He'll come to a bad end some day, and be taken home to his ma in a sack.'

'That's why he has to have his name and address on him,' Libby laughed, and turned away as the others vanished into the barn, Tib leading the way, her face alight with relief.

In Rowena's tent Opechee stood braiding her black hair in two plaits, Romany was tying on her head-band, Renée was lacing the leather thongs of her gown, and Tanpa was hanging strings of honour beads round her neck. They welcomed Libby warmly, and she laid aside her big coat for a moment, for the tent was warm.

'I say! You have dressed for the part!' The Gipsy said admiringly.

The Birch Tree tossed back her chestnut braids and turned to look. 'That's ripping, Lib! I *say*! How it suits you to do your hair like that! You should stick to it for always!'

'It looks redder than usual to-night. Have you dipped it in liquid copper?' laughed The Robin.

'That's the brown frock. Brown always brings out the red even in mine,' said Rowena.

Libby had dressed for the meeting in a loose, graceful frock of soft brown velveteen, with touches of gold embroidery, which had been her best dress during the winter. The dull, rich effect of the material was really more like an Indian maiden's deerskin robe even than the khaki Camp Fire gowns, so it looked quite suitable to the occasion. She had done her hair in the correct style, parting it in the middle and drawing it into two loose braids on her breast. To complete her costume, Rowena handed her a head-band woven of dark-green and silver beads. 'Would you like to borrow this till you can make your own? I made it for myself, and then decided a bright gold and green one would be prettier for me. Your hair's so bright that the dark band will look better on you, and the silver flashes finely in the candle-light.'

'Oh, thank you! That is jolly! I sha'n't feel quite so undressed among all the rest of you, even if I haven't any beads on!'

'I'm afraid we can't give you those. You'll have to win them. But you'll soon have some.'

'That head-band suits you, too,' said The Queen. 'I'll look after you, Lib. Tanpa will have to lead the procession, as she's our only Torch-Bearer. But I'm only a Wood-Gatherer still, so you can follow me.'

The boys and Tibby found the big barn full of shadows when they entered, for, though it was still early evening, the overhanging clouds and great sycamore-trees shut out the light. From the dim far end of the barn came much laughter and chattering, which turned to sudden amazed silence at sight of Tibby and the visitors.

'We sha'n't be able to see much,' said Ribby, with a sudden attack of shyness.

'They like it dark for a Camp Fire meeting. They always wait till the evening if they can, or darken the room when they have a daylight meeting indoors.'

'Tib Mackenzie, who have you got there?' Samanthy's voice rang shrilly across the barn.

Perky Jim chuckled. 'Sammy's got the wind up! Didn't she know we were coming?'

'I don't know. We haven't been in the camp all day.'

Sammy certainly had not known. Nothing had been said to the Guides about the business of the evening before. She came flying across the empty barn, righteous indignation fairly tumbling out of her. 'Ribby Stanley! Perks! What *do* you mean by it?—Tib, how could you

bring them here? Weena would have a fit!—Just you clear out at once, you two, or something will happen when the Camp Fire come along! You aren't invited to ceremonial meetings!'

'Just what we happen to be, Samanthy!' Ribby assured her airily. 'Little girls don't know everything! We want front-seats. Where do we go?'

'Fact, Sam!' Perks grinned at her astonished face.

'The Camp Fire have invited them, Sammy. I—I asked them to,' Tibby faltered apologetically.

Samanthy looked from one to the other. '*Well!*' she said expressively. 'What on earth have they done it for? I say! Does Weena know? Did she agree? She said she never would!'

'She did, though. She didn't want to, but she did say she was willing,' Tib explained.

'Weena's soft!' Sammy said scornfully. 'I wouldn't ever have let them come if it had been anything to do with me!'

'Samanthy's "some" riled, isn't she?' Ribby turned to Tib, and spoke in a tone of polite interest.

'Here come the girls! I hear the singing! Oh, where shall we go?—I say, Sammy, don't be a pig!' pleaded Tibby. 'Tell us what to do! Where shall we be out of the way?'

'Up there on the hay! Scoot!' said Sammy briefly, and scooted herself.

The boys and Tib fled to the far end of the barn, and rolled and scrambled up among the Guides already ensconced there. They had made themselves nests in the hay, and showed quite plainly that they resented being disturbed in this fashion, and that they were inclined to look on the boys as interlopers. So Tib, picking her way carefully among the nesting Robins and Brownies, led the boys to the back, where they piled up the hay and sat in gallery seats.

In by the big doorway, led by the Guardian and then the Torch-Bearer, came the girls in their Camp Fire gowns and beads, singing softly an American chorus. The boys' eyes grew round, and all desire for mockery died away. They had seen Rowena's gown, but had not realised the effect of twenty, all alike, and yet all different. Ribby stared at Miss Helen, and his lips formed a whistle, though no sound came; he was comparing her with the lady who had called on him and lectured him the night before, and wondering what she had done to herself, for he had been quite unprepared for the disguising effect of twinkling bead head-band and long hanging plaits of dark hair. She looked very stately as she stood waiting in her place, while the girls formed slowly in a wide circle; and Rowena and Rose, coming to take their places after closing the heavy doors, were scarcely less so. Wide-eyed and astonished, the boys watched, as Lib and Tib had done the week before, and kept their comments and questions till afterwards.

When the singing ceased, the Guardian bade the Wood-Gatherers bring the wood for the Council Fire, and then called on the Fire-Makers to lay it. Then she handed a lighted taper to Rowena, who knelt and lit the Fire, and once more the girls broke into song—'Burn, fire, burn!' The candles for Work, Health, and Love were placed in their wide triangle and lit by The Beaver, The Gipsy, and The Queen; and when all were seated around them, Yallani, The Mountain, stood up to read the Count of the last meeting, written by The Owl, from the big Record Book.

The roll was then called, each member answering, as before, by explaining her name.

'Tumaga!'

'I am The Bee. I look for all the sweetness in life, and try to pass it on.'

'Watanopa!'

'I am The Adventurous One. I seek new experiences, and delight in the opening ways of life.'

'Killooleet!'

'I am The Song-Sparrow. I will try to "make music wherever I go."'

'Lexse!'

'I am The Clover-Leaf. My three leaves are Work, and Health, and Love.'

Then the Guardian rose. 'A maiden is with us to-night who desires to sit with us around our Fire. Camp Fire Sisters, are you willing to receive Elizabeth Margaret Mackenzie into our circle?'

'Who's she?' murmured Ribby, as the girls expressed their hearty agreement. 'Your Libby? I hardly knew her by all that name! What's yours, when you aren't Tib?'

'Isobel Mary. Whisht! The Guardian's asking her if she'll keep the Law.'

'I *say*! Doesn't she look simply topping?' Ribby murmured admiringly, as Libby, flushed and nervous, rose and repeated the Camp Fire Law.

'This Law of the Fire I will strive to follow,' said she clearly, if tremulously, and came forward to sign her name in the book.

Led by The Silver Birch Tree, the girls gave a welcoming cheer, as Libby, covered with confusion, slipped into her place again. But presently she had to come forward once more, for Rowena had whispered to the Guardian, and Uda explained that the new member had chosen her name, and called on her to take it formally.

Standing by the Fire, Libby threw into it a slip of paper on which she had written her full name, and said shyly, 'I, Elizabeth Margaret Mackenzie, take Witawentin to be my Camp Fire name. Witawentin means "To live together," and I will try to learn how to live happily with those around me, and how to do my share to help on the life of my home, or school, or camp. My symbol will be two girls, hand-in-hand, inside a tent.'

'Well done, Witawentin!' said the Guardian heartily. 'You have chosen a long name, and one with a big meaning, which will want some living up to. "To live together" is one of the biggest lessons life has to teach us, and it takes many of us years to learn it properly. I am sure you will be worthy of it.'

'I'll try, Guardian;' and Witawentin slipped into her corner again, looking much embarrassed.

Aurora and Kokokoho then came forward to receive rank as Fire-Makers. The Guardian questioned them on several of the required honours, then placed a silver bracelet on the arm of each, and bade them help to lay the Fire at the next Council meeting. There were not many new honours to give out, since only a week had passed since the last meeting, but several girls had won their Health bead for walking forty miles in ten days; others had been learning the names of trees, birds, and flowers, or had been out on the Downs after dark for a lesson in star-constellations, and these all meant blue Nature beads. Others could claim new accomplishments in cookery and Hand Craft; Kokokoho had had a story accepted for the school magazine; Renée had finished three months of regular weekly mending, Tamakwa had made herself a blouse, and Tumaga had trimmed a hat.

'It's nearly all the younger ones who are getting beads to-night!' Tib Mackenzie whispered. 'I wonder why. Rowena has none, nor Rose, nor—oh, any of the seniors, almost!'

'They've been slacking,' Perks suggested.

'Just the opposite!' Vera, the patrol-leader, flashed out at him in an indignant undertone. 'All those seniors are taking matric. at the end of June. Honours have to wait till that's over, except for regular weekly things like mending. They haven't time for extras; they're swotting too hard. Don't talk about things you don't understand!'

'Little me's squashed!' murmured Perks, and, completely crushed, said no more.

At last it was time for the visitors to go, for Miss Helen announced that there were several matters to be discussed around the Council Fire, but that the deliberations of the Camp must be held in secret. The Guides promptly tumbled out of the hay and slipped round the side to

the door, followed by Tibby and the boys; while the Camp Fire Girls sat round the Fire, stringing their new beads and talking in undertones.

When the heavy door was closed again, Uda said briskly, 'Now, girls! The great question is the new Guardian. Are you willing to invite Miss Betts, or has any one any other suggestion?'

'We haven't one, Uda.' Tanpa spoke for the rest. 'We've hardly talked of anything else all week, but there seems no one else. But you'll tell her we want her to do it properly, won't you?'

'My dear Tanpa, how can I possibly do that? You must leave it to her. I will help her in any way I can, of course; and I hope you will all do the same. Girls, I do hope you will make her feel at home if she accepts. It rests with you very largely whether she will be able to become one of you or not. We are very much of a family; if you keep her an outsider, it will be an impossible position for her.'

'Impossible for us too!' Yallani murmured. 'It would be awfully awkward.'

'It depends a good lot on her too, Uda,' said Killooleet.

'Just try to realise how difficult it will be for Miss Betts at first, girls,' the Guardian said earnestly. 'She will know perfectly well you are only asking her because you can't get any one else. It isn't very nice for her, is it?'

'I say, it does sound awful when you put it that way!' cried The Beaver. 'After all, Guardian, we might have asked Mademoiselle!'

'Tamakwa!' There was a howl of derision.

'We might! But then, again, we mightn't!' Watanopa said solemnly.

'Might as well ask Bobs herself while you're at it,' growled The Robin. 'Oh, I say—I'm sorry, Miss Helen!'

There was a smothered giggle from the circle. The Guardian laughed, but made no comment. It was understood that anything said around the Council Fire was in confidence, and not to be judged according to ordinary school standards.

'But Tamakwa's quite right, Uda!' put in The Rainbow eagerly. 'We had two or three to choose from, and we have chosen Betty. We will back her up, really and truly. Won't you tell her so?'

'Certainly I will. But you must give your invitation yourselves. You had better appoint a deputation to wait on her as soon as possible.'

'Tanpa, of course, and Nyoda and Yallani, because they're the seniors, and Watanopa and Opechee and Tamakwa, because they've cheek enough for anything'——

'And what about yourself, Killooleet?' cried Watanopa indignantly.

'And Grey Edward, because he's the mascot.'

'No; we'll all go!' said the Guardian. 'To-morrow after the match; every one of you be ready, and we'll get hold of her before we come back to camp.—Lib—Witawentin, I mean!—you'd better come and watch the match; it's on our own ground. Then you can go with us to ask Betty, and be introduced to her.'

'I'd love to! But I've seen her already, you know; in the train that day.'

'Guardian, I've a question to ask,' said The Silver Birch Tree. A respectful silence fell, and they all waited curiously. 'Uda, would you mind if we worked a bead band like yours for the new Guardian's gown, and presented it to her? Do you mind if hers is the same as yours in the skirt?'

'It's all our symbols done in beadwork,' The Queen explained to Libby, whose eyes had fastened at once on the broad bead band around the Guardian's skirt. 'Above the symbols she works the sign of the girl's rank; and above that, all up the gown, are each girl's honours done

in little coloured crosses. So you have only to look at Uda to see who is what and who has what. It's a kind of story gown.'

'I wondered what it all meant. It looks very Indian.'

'That's the coloured crosses, I suppose. I know Uda's very proud of her gown. She means to keep it "for always and always and always." Perhaps she won't want Betty to have hers the same.'

'That wouldn't be like her,' said The Gipsy. 'She's too jolly nice.'

She was right. Miss Helen said heartily, 'That would be a delightful idea, Tanpa, and would be a very suitable way of welcoming her. I am sure she would be pleased. It is, to my mind, the very best kind of decoration for a Guardian's gown. I am sure Miss Betts would be proud to wear your symbols, rank, and attainments on her dress. But will you have time? There's a great deal of work in it. What about matric.?'

'Matric.'s blighting our lives at present!' The Mountain sighed.

'Oh, we'll each do our own, and pass the loom round. It won't take any one very long. We'll get it started, then.'

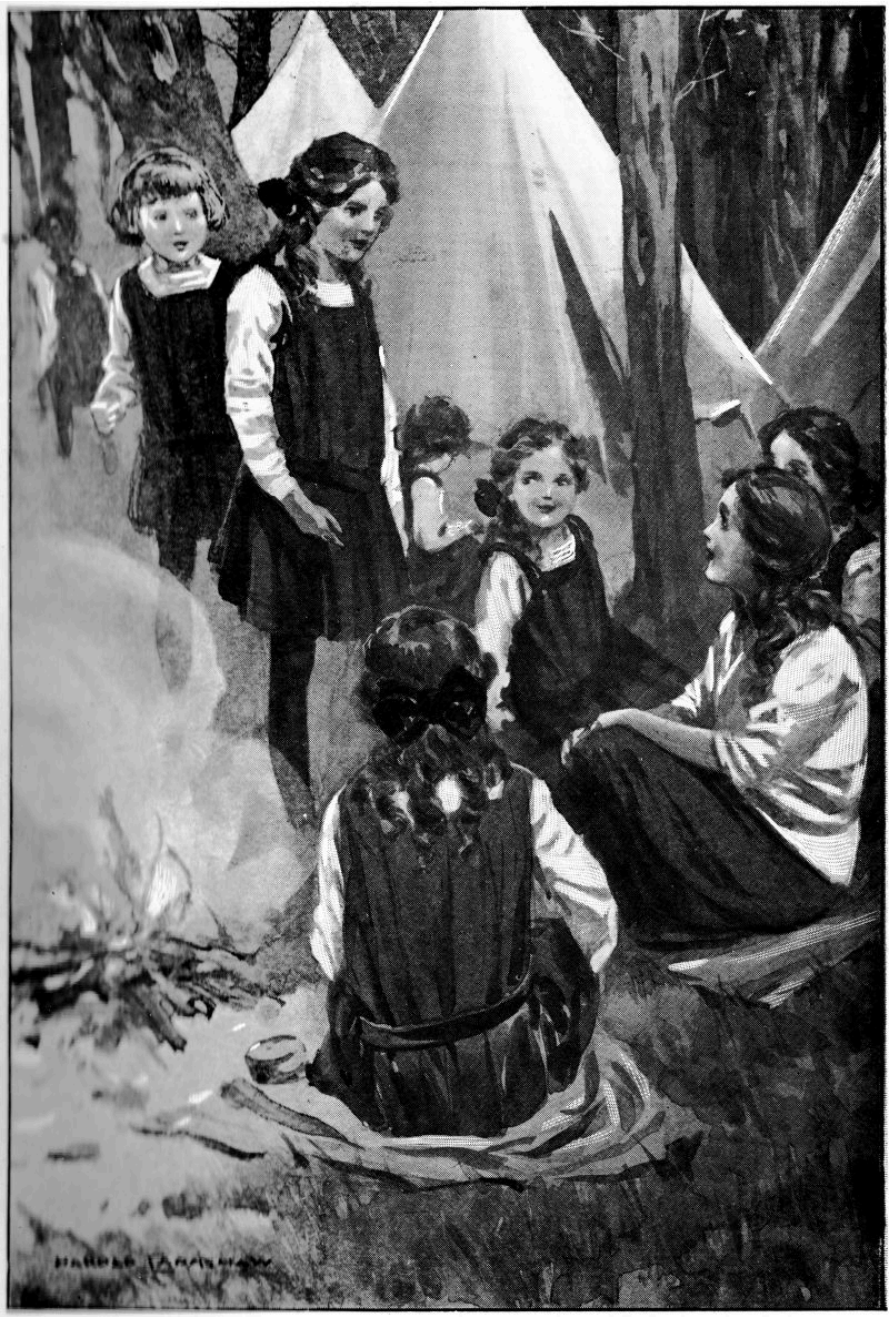
'Now we really must get back to camp, if any of you are going to be up to do weeding tomorrow morning,' said Miss Helen.

'It's the Guides' turn. But we want to get on with our camp jobs because of the match in the afternoon,' Dawn explained. 'It's going to be a wet wicket. It will be your day, Nyoda and Yallani. Get me some good catches, if you can!'

'Better get Betty to lend a hand. She's a bowler,' The Gipsy suggested.

'Not unless one of our own men crocks up. I wish somebody would! Let's ask Vera to sprain her ankle! She's not much good; she's for ever drilling her Guides,' The Rainbow proposed.

'We'll see you home, Witawentin!' said Watanopa when the evening hymn had been sung; and several of the elder girls went with Libby to the gate, while Tanpa and Opechee put out the Council Fire.



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Sammy and Cicely came over from the Guides' camp to propose a sing-song.

CHAPTER XXV.
LIVING TOGETHER.

'What a queer name you've chosen, Lib!' Tibby was quite herself again as they went to bed that night. 'Did you think of it yourself?'

'No; how could I? I don't know any Indian names. Rowena gave it to me.'

'Who are you going to learn to live with?' Tibby laughed.

'Oh, everybody! But just now I'm going to bed. I'm awfully tired.'

'Ribby tried to make it up with Sammy when we got out of the meeting, but she won't forgive him for saying she played soldiers. I don't blame her, either. She wouldn't listen when he tried to say he was sorry.'

'She ought to have, then. If a person says he's sorry, that ought to be enough. You know that yourself, Tib.'

'Sammy doesn't think so. She says Rowena's soft to let him off so easily.'

'Sammy's a silly kid,' Lib said sleepily.

Ribby had his own ideas as to his duty towards his elder sister, however. He arrived at the camp next morning very early, before starting for school, and found every one busy, tidying tents, making beds, and airing blankets outside, for the sun was shining for the first time for three days, and the prospects for the afternoon match looked more cheerful.

'Tanpa, here are some gentlemen to see you!' sang out The Robin, as she brought wood to make up the camp fire.

The Queen came to the door of her tent to look over the shoulder of The Gipsy, who was cleaning her tennis-shoes. The Adventurer drew near curiously to listen, and tripped over Grey Edward, who was lying before the fire. He told her what he thought of her clumsiness, and she apologised; while The Robin shook her head at him severely.

'Swearing again, Little Grey? I'm shocked, and pained, and grieved at the words I hear you say sometimes!'

Edward yawned and began to wash his face, and The Beaver cried triumphantly, 'He isn't listening! He never heard you, Robin!'

'Wouldn't understand me if he did! He's far too silly!'

'He's not, then! He knows every word you say to him. And he's going to have a beautiful new collar! All his kind friends have helped to buy it for him!—I say, Tanpa! You're wanted!'

Rowena came out carrying an armful of blankets, which she threw over a rope stretched between two trees. Then she turned to the boys. 'Well, Ribby Stanley?'

Ribby's eyes danced; he understood her accusing tone perfectly. But he said frankly, 'I say, old girl, I came to say I'm awfully sorry.'

'Oh, you did, did you?' But Rowena's tone showed signs of relenting. She never could withstand a frank apology.

'I am, really and truly. I didn't understand. I was trying to make you mad, because I thought you were cracked about it all without any reason. I didn't think there was any sense in it. But that was only because I didn't know. I won't say another word against the Camp Fire after last night, honest I won't.'

Rowena thawed visibly. 'You hadn't any right to talk as you did to strangers, telling them a lot of nonsense!'

'No, I hadn't, and that's the truth. I never will again. I'll crack up the Camp Fire every chance I get. The meeting was topping; I didn't think it would be like that. I'm awfully glad to

have seen it. And I think it was jolly decent of you to let us come. It was jolly of them all, but it was just ripping of you, considering! Thanks awfully!'

'Now that's what I call doing the thing handsomely!' said The Rainbow, coming up from the stream carrying a pail of water, and overhearing the last sentence. 'You're a gentleman, sir!'

'If I am, I guess you'd better let me carry that pail for you,' Ribby laughed.

'No, thanks. I'm not old and infirm yet. But you can rescue that other pail from The Bee, if you like. She's not old enough to lug pails about, but she will do it because she wants to think she's as old as we are. That kid by the stream is The Bee. I spend my life in camp getting pails away from her and Tchikash. Thanks awfully!'

'It's all right, Ribs,' said Rowena, as he turned to her again. 'You're a silly kid, but we'll say no more about it.'

Ribby made a grimace, but let the insult pass in the circumstances. 'I can't square up with Sam. She won't speak to me.'

'I don't suppose she will. You hurt her feelings frightfully. You'll have to get round her somehow. Now clear out, old chap! We're going to get breakfast!'

'Awfully kind of you to subscribe to Grey Edward's new collar!' The Beaver called after them.

'He's still swearing something fearful, is Little Grey,' The Robin added. 'He's the worst-brought-up cat that ever was!'

'Well, Watanopa kicked him right in the middle! What could you expect? He doesn't like his tummy trampled on!' The Beaver protested indignantly.

That afternoon Libby sat among the crowd watching the match, on the sloping banks of the cricket-field behind the school. Sitting between The Queen and The Owl, who were not in the team, she watched Nyoda's swift bowling and Yallani's lobs, saw The Dawn make a brilliant catch, and The Birch Tree acting as wicket-keeper. She saw The Beaver make the highest score, and The Gipsy make the winning hit for the school. In the tea interval she was introduced to Mademoiselle and several other mistresses, and was sent for by Miss Robinson, whom she had already met when that lady paid an afternoon call on Mrs Mackenzie. The head-mistress was well pleased with the progress their friendship was making, and had heard from Miss Helen of Libby's adoption into the Camp Fire with much satisfaction.

Tib was beside her during these introductions, thankful that she was not the eldest, and so at least was spared the ordeal of being the first to be spoken to. They met so many girls that they grew quite bewildered, and were grateful for the chance the camp had offered them of making real friends with a few.

Libby, of course, was among the crowd of Camp Fire Girls who sought Miss Betts after the match and formally invited her to become their new Guardian. Rowena was thrust forward to utter the wishes of all, and did so heartily and urgently. The secret had been well kept, although known to so many. Miss Betts was completely taken by surprise, though there had been much discussion in the rest of the school as to Miss Helen's successor. She begged for a few days to think the matter over, thanking them warmly for the compliment paid her, in any case.

'I would like to ask Miss Helen's opinion as to whether I should be suitable. I would not care to take the position unless I could do for you all that I feel ought to be done. Of course, I know no one can take her place adequately, but I suppose you are prepared for that. You can't expect another Guardian such as she has been. I will ask her just what it means, and in the meantime I thank you all again, and feel greatly honoured.'

'She'll do it all right,' Rowena said, as they moved away. 'Uda will reassure her, and tell her to take it on. I guess we'll get on all right with Betty.'

‘But will she put her hair down?’ Watanopa insisted.

‘I bet you she will,’ said The Mountain promptly. ‘Betty’s a sport.’

‘And will she take an Indian name?’

‘We can’t ask her that kind of thing. We’ll have to wait for her first meeting and see. Perhaps Uda will tell her she’s got to,’ Rowena said comfortingly.

They strolled away over the Downs to supper in camp, rejoicing in the return of the fine weather. When all had rested and the supper-dishes were washed-up and put out of sight, Sammy and Cicely came over from the Guides’ camp to propose a sing-song, each camp to sing against the other, in turn. The Camp Fire agreed, and the Guides led off with the ‘Skye Boat Song.’ Camp Potawatomi responded with ‘My Old Kentucky Home;’ and so the concert proceeded, each group sitting around its blazing fire and singing lustily when its turn came. Libby, singing with the rest when she knew the words, was taking a lesson from Yallani in the use of the little bead-loom, for The Mountain had finished her chain, and was willing to lend her loom to the new member. Watanopa, on Lib’s other side, was cutting and fixing the warp threads for the new Guardian’s band of symbols on another loom; and The Birch Tree, sketching-block on knee, was arranging the order of the designs with reference to colour and artistic effect.

‘Put yourself right in the middle of the front, Tanpa,’ said The Rainbow. ‘We won’t think you conceited. You’re the only Torch-Bearer, and you’ve most honours, too. It will look lop-sided if you don’t.’

‘I’ll put you and Killooleet on each side, then, for you have next most;’ and Rowena continued her planning, sketching in the symbols as she proceeded. ‘Queen, I’m starting with you. You can do your golden crown on Monday night.’

‘Right!’ said Renée. ‘Who’s next to me? Romany?’

‘Yes—two white tents and the camp fire. And then Dawn’s rising sun. The Bee and Tchikash and the other juniors will have to go round the back—and you, Witawentin, since you’re a new member.’

Libby laughed and nodded. ‘I haven’t any honours yet, either. Put me in a corner somewhere, where I won’t show much.’

All the next week she worked at her head-band and gown, the khaki material and fringe for which she received from Miss Helen at school on the day the camp broke up, and the Brownies regretfully went back to ordinary life. The Camp Fire went all together to receive Miss Betts’s answer as soon as they reached the school, Libby going with them and helping to carry the luggage. Miss Betts accepted the post of Guardian with a few words of appreciation of the honour shown to her, and promised to do her best to satisfy the requirements of the position. More than that she did not say, and the girls were left in doubt as to how far she meant to enter into their ideas. They dared not ask bluntly if she would sit on the floor and put her hair down, so had to remain in suspense until her first meeting should answer all their questions. The general opinion agreed with Yallani, The Mountain, that ‘Betty was a sport, and would do the thing in style,’ but no one could be sure. At times, when she took them to task for cookery notebooks not kept neatly up to date, or needlework which did not come up to her ideas, they looked at one another, and decided that she would probably not consent to lay aside her authority and become one of themselves for the time.

Grey Edward, as the camp mascot, went with the girls to hear her answer. He was resplendent in a very fine new collar of pale-blue leather, with silver fittings and bells, and his name engraved on a silver disc which hung beneath his chin—a very much finer collar than he had ever had before, thanks to the generosity of his many friends. He seemed quite aware of the fact, and indeed looked so utterly pleased with himself that there appeared to be more reason than usual for The Robin’s constant refrain, ‘Isn’t pretty! Isn’t beautiful! Is just a hijjus,

ugly, old tom-cat, and an awful swanker!' As she explained, if his conceit was to be kept within bounds at all, some one had to administer an antidote to the fulsome flattery which The Beaver, and indeed most of his other friends, showered upon him all day long. And Tamakwa's insistent rejoinder that he was not listening, and never heard a word she said, only brought from Opechee the contemptuous retort, 'Then he's deaf as well as stuck-up and silly, and *I* think he should see a doctor at once!'

The girls would have been glad to have an early meeting and feel that all their questions were answered, but it had been decided not to hold a ceremonial until matric. was over, so that the seniors could devote themselves entirely to their work. This gave several weeks for the winning of honours, so far as the other members were concerned, and Witawentin, for one, was determined to have earned the right to wear some beads by the time the meeting was held. She set herself to walk forty miles in ten days, and to cycle the same distance in five; to make her gown and head-band, which would count for two; to make lists of trees, flowers, birds, and stars, on which she begged one of the elder girls to question her; and to fulfil certain household duties, such as ironing, making and airing her bed, and learning some elementary cookery, so that a few of the brilliant flame-coloured beads for Home Craft might be hers. Much amused, her mother gave her the chances her new energy desired, and vowed the Camp Fire was a very useful institution.

But while Lib was thus happy, Tib was no less so, and quite as busy. On the Saturday afternoon following the breaking-up of the camp, the Guides paraded on the playing-field in full uniform, before an inspiring array of mistresses, friends, and visitors; while the Brownies, with Libby among them, sat on the sloping banks to watch and criticise. New badges were distributed by Miss Robinson, and Tibby was formally enrolled as a Guide, receiving her hat, scarf, and staff, and the trefoil brooch which was to be her badge, and the ribbons of the Oak-Leaf Patrol, in addition to the blue skirt and blouse lent her until she could make her own. Thereafter she was rarely at home when the Guides were at liberty, but was up at the school being drilled, learning to tie knots, and being coached by Samanthy in the various requirements which would qualify her to become a Second-Class Guide and to be no longer a Tenderfoot. During school-hours she studied First Aid and practised the accomplishments taught her by Sammy, struggled to lay and light fires out of doors and to make camp ovens, and pored over the list of proficiency badges, trying to decide which to work for first.

'What would you do, Libby?' she asked one day, carrying the handbook out to where Lib sat in the garden bending over the little loom, her beads glittering in the sunshine. 'They say Laundress is the easiest badge to get, but I don't know the first thing about it.'

Libby tied on a new thread carefully, and then looked down the list of requirements for badges. 'I should try the Cyclist. You've got a bike. And the Swimmer; you're fond of bathing. I should take Sammy's advice about it, though. She's done several of them, so she'll know. You can't begin for two months, can you?'

'I can't get them while I'm a Tenderfoot, but I could begin working, I suppose. How awfully pretty that's going to be, Lib! Tell me what it all means!'

'Well, that's you, and this is me!' and Libby pointed gravely to two little triangular figures worked in shining beads. 'Don't laugh! They're Indian figures for girls, really and truly; you can see their skirts! If they were boys they'd have legs. We're hand-in-hand—"Living together," you see. This diamond stands for mother; father will be at the other side; a diamond is Indian for a grown-up person. They're gold because nothing could be too good for father and mother! This in the middle is our tent, or lodge, and these dots are all four of us living together inside it. Here at this end are a lot of little tents for a camp, and at the other end I'm going to have a camp fire with three flames for Work and Health and Love—living together in

ordinary life and in the Camp Fire! The band is blue, for happiness. I thought of rose-colour, but I really couldn't wear rose!'

Tibby laughed. 'I should say not! And why are you and I all shining white?'

Libby soberly selected a needleful of beads, and worked them into position with the fingers of her left hand, and drew the thread back through them before she answered. 'White stands for purity and goodness, doesn't it? We want to live together properly, not just anyhow. Blue and white are my chief colours, because of their meaning—happiness and goodness. But mother and father had to be gold!'

'I see!' Tib was deeply impressed. 'It all means things. It says "Living together" all the way along! I never thought you could put that funny name into a bead band! Did Rowena tell you how to do it?'

'Some. Some I thought of myself.'

'Why are the tents dark brown?'

'To show up the silver figures inside!' Libby laughed. 'You mustn't ask *too* many questions! But Indian tents, or lodges, would be brown, not white, you know!' She picked up the khaki gown hung over the back of her chair, and spread it out on the grass before Tibby's interested eyes. 'I'm going to put big brown triangles, for tents, round the hem of my gown, with little groups of people in them, and they're all going to have meanings! One will be just you and me, one will be us and mother and father, one will be me and a silver birch tree, and one will be you and Sammy! Shall I work you in dark blue, for your uniform, or shall I put two clover-leaves? I think that would be pretty; any one would see it meant two Guides.'

Tibby laughed. 'You do have ideas! It's a good thing I don't have to decorate a gown! I could never think of a single thing.'

'That's one bit of the Camp Fire I like so much—the symbols. I love thinking of meanings for everything.'

'I couldn't do it; I'm not made that way! I wouldn't have believed you could put "To live together" into pictures, and embroider it on a dress, but it sounds as if it might be quite pretty.'

'I'm going to put the boys with us into one of my tents,' Libby observed.

'How will you make a boy?'

'I told you; the same as a girl, but with legs instead of a skirt.'

Tibby laughed. 'Better not let Ribby see it. You'll hurt his feelings. I suppose you'll put Grey Edward and Great Britain into a tent too?'

'If I've one to spare for them!' Libby laughed. 'I hadn't thought of it. Has Sammy forgiven Ribby yet, Tib?'

'Not a bit. She won't go home for week-ends because she says she knows they'd scrap all the time.'

'She is a donkey!' said Lib.

'And I was one too!' she said to herself when Tib had gone, 'I needn't have worried so. I felt as if it would be the end of everything if Tibby joined the Guides and I the Camp Fire. But it isn't. It's more like the beginning of new and awfully jolly things. She's interested in mine, and I am in hers, and so we each get a bit of both. Living together is really quite easy—when you know how! I'm awfully glad Rowena taught me how to do it!'

CHAPTER XXVI.
CAPTAIN JOCK.

After all, Miss Helen's marriage had to be postponed beyond half-term, and Lib and Tib were inmates of the school before the great occasion arrived. Some unfavourable symptoms kept Captain Macgregor in hospital three weeks longer than had been expected, and the bride 'just had to wait for the doctor's leave,' as she laughingly put it.

The girls rejoiced openly. Provided the wedding was not put off so long that it would fall in the summer holidays, they were grateful for every additional day they could keep Miss Helen to themselves, and the extra time for preparation was not to be despised.

Every one was making presents in spare moments, of course, and particularly the girls of Camp Potawatomi. Yallani had reclaimed her loom as soon as Libby had finished her bead-band, and was making a dainty bead chain with tasselled ends. Rowena was illuminating a copy of the Camp Fire Law, with a wide border, into which were worked the symbols of all the girls; and this, when the Guardian received it the night before the wedding, gave her as much pleasure as any other gift could possibly have done. Watanopa, who had a small camera, was preparing a book of snapshots of the last camping fortnight; and this, too, gave much delight to Uda. 'The little gray forest bird,' Tchikash, was working laboriously at crochet lace, which Miss Helen promised to use as trimming on her new underclothes, to Sybil's great joy and pride. Killooleet was knitting lace for a traycloth which The Rainbow was embroidering, and Romany was making a wide crochet border with elaborate corners for another, on which Renée was doing delicate drawn-thread work. The Owl was composing a Wedding Ode, in spite of jeers from her companions; and Dawn was struggling with a rather doubtful sketch in colour of the camp in the Sycamore Wood. Fancy needlework of every kind was being done in such quantities that Miss Robinson laughingly declared one would think there was a bazaar coming on.

'If only she was going to have a house, so that she could use it all!' The Robin sighed one day, as she sat working on the banks of the cricket-field with The Beaver and the little Bee. 'To think of it all being packed away out of sight! I think war weddings are horrid!'

'She'll have a house soon. The war can't go on for ever,' Tamakwa suggested. 'Everybody's getting sick of it. I know *I* am!'

'That's because you don't get enough sugar in your tea,' said Dawn, pausing beside them as she heard the last words.

There was a general laugh as The Beaver groaned, for her complaints had been loud and most unpatriotic.

'Is The Beaver grumbling about sugar again?' The Owl came up beside Aurora. 'I knew she moaned every meal-time, but I didn't know we'd got to endure it between whiles as well.'

'I never did! I only said I was sick of the war, and I hoped Miss Helen would soon be able to have a house and use all these things,' Tamakwa said indignantly.

'Oh, well, so do we all! But not having a house isn't the worst part of it. She'll feel frightfully bad when he has to go back.'

'She must come back here, and if she can't have him, at least there'll be all of us.'

'As if all of us three times over would make up!' said Kokokoho scornfully.

'It's a nightmare of an idea—all of us three times over!' Dawn remarked.

But though no one pretended to think that the love of a score of schoolgirls could make up for the loss of one husband, it was felt that it might be better than nothing, and so it was understood that when the honeymoon was over, and the few extra weeks of home duty on

which Miss Helen was counting had come to an end, and when the evil day came that Captain Macgregor must go back to France, Miss Helen would return to find comfort and the warmest of welcomes in her old home.

'Something to look forward to next term!' said The Rainbow.

'Shall we have to call her *Mrs* Helen?' The little Bee looked up in dismay. 'Rose, we couldn't possibly!'

'We never could!' A dismayed chorus greeted this dreadful idea.

'I guess we'll have to!' Opechee said gloomily.

'I think we should stick to "Uda." That's safe, anyway. She could never expect us to call her "Mrs Uda"!' said The Adventurer brilliantly.

A howl of derision greeted the idea of 'Mrs Uda,' but Watanopa's suggestion was felt by all to be the best solution of a real difficulty.

'I'm just aching to see him!' sighed Dawn; and every one agreed with her.

At half-term Libby and Tib went to school in earnest, and said temporary good-byes to their parents, with regret, of course, but with none of the grief or fear they had dreaded. It was strange to leave home and be for ever one of a crowd, to have meals at long tables with dozens of other girls instead of in the quiet of home, and strangest of all to sleep in a long dormitory with eighteen others. But they had too many good friends in the school to have any dread of going there; they had spent too many evenings sitting with the rest on the banks of the playing-field, eating bread-and-butter and fruit, discussing wedding-presents or talking of honours and badges, and they were too deeply engrossed in all the interests of the school, to hesitate when asked if they would like to go there altogether. They went happily, and even eagerly, to the great relief of their parents.

It was a strange experience, too, to Libby at least, to realise that her friends of Camp Potawatomi had other names besides those by which she had so far known them. She jumped and stared the first time she heard Watanopa addressed as Daisy, or Aurora as Muriel. She had known vaguely that Yallani's name was Doris, and Killooleet's Elsa, but had forgotten that the others must also have more usual names than their Indian ones, and could not remember for some time that in class The Beaver must be addressed as Marjorie and The Bee as Janet; that the swarthy Robin was really Lilian, and Kokokoho Ada.

'It is funny! I'd forgotten you'd all have other names at school!' she laughed.

'Well, I must say, Witawentin! Did you really expect Mademoiselle to call me Watanopa?'

'Or Bobs to call out in class, "Owl, are you going to sleep in that corner? Beaver, don't lounge over your desk! Mountain, come and do a prop. on the blackboard! Robin, don't whisper to The Dawn!" *Did* you expect that now, Lib?'

'I never thought about it!' Libby laughed again.

Until matric. was over, the seniors were worried and working hard, and were grateful to the doctors for the postponement of the wedding. But once the exam. was safely past, they were able to enjoy life again and devote their leisure moments to finishing their wedding-presents and making plans for the second period of camping, which was promised for the middle of July, immediately following the wedding.

'It will console us a bit for losing Miss Helen, perhaps,' said the Camp Fire Girls. They were anxious to keep her as their Guardian until the last possible moment; so, though informal meetings continued to be held both before and after matric., the ceremonial meeting, at which Miss Betts was to be welcomed as Guardian, was postponed until the night before the wedding. Miss Helen promised to come just for a few minutes, and then to leave them with 'Betty,' for she would be very busy.

Ordinary meetings were held sometimes in the cosy library at school, but more often took the form of rambles on the Downs or shore or cliffs. The Camp Fire was many-sided, and

anything which made for the widening of the girls' outlook and breadth of view, or for increase of knowledge and health, was welcome. On Saturdays, while the Guides were out on route-marches, the Camp Fire strolled across the Downs to picnic in some tiny village among the hills, where an old church or castle gave a touch of romance and historical atmosphere. Libby found her delight in these excursions shared by most of her new friends, but particularly by Rowena, because of her love for her native countryside, and Kokokoho, because the mere hint of a story brought delight to her literary mind. Watanopa's camera was much in request on these occasions, so long as they were out of sight of the military authorities of the neighbourhood, and her collection of Camp Fire snapshots grew rapidly.

Then one day there came a great excitement. It was the last day of matric., and the exam. girls came back from town tired but relieved, and expecting to be received with due respect and treated with special consideration for a few days. But they found themselves forgotten, and speedily forgot themselves, in the thrill of expectancy which overhung the school.

Miss Helen had received a telegram during dinner, which had made her laugh and redden and disappear upstairs in a great hurry—'Looking like a rose,' said Kokokoho romantically.

'Or a beetroot,' The Adventurer added ruthlessly.

No one knew anything for certain, but all had hopes that their guess would prove to be right. Was *he* coming to see her, as he had promised? Had he left the hospital at last? Were they to be satisfied by a sight of the fortunate bridegroom?

'I hate him!' Yallani proclaimed dramatically again.

'He won't care!' The Beaver assured her cheerfully.

'All the same, I hate him fiercely!' The Mountain insisted.

But she took it back before night; for the school, to the last girl, fell in love with Miss Helen's captain when he appeared with her at tea, having arrived while they were all, most reluctantly, out for an afternoon walk. The fact that he did appear, and did not shirk the ordeal by having a private tea with his bride, endeared him to them at once. And who could resist such a 'gorgeous Highlander'? as The Rainbow said ecstatically. His kilt was very dark green and black tartan—'In *beautiful* pleats,' whispered Killooleet when she saw it; there were rosettes of bright Irish green, with flying ribbons, at one side; his hose-tops and flashes were scarlet and white, and so was the diced band on his bonnet; his dirk was in his stocking; his sporran was a thing of beauty, six very white bristly tassels with gilt tops, and above them a grinning furry creature's head. It was small wonder that the girls could not take their eyes off him until all this glory was hidden behind Miss Robinson's table. And when at last they looked up at his face, it was so kindly and brown, in spite of his time in hospital, and his eyes were so full of amusement at their wide-eyed joyous stare, that even as theirs fell in conscious embarrassment they all, even Yallani, voted him 'almost good enough for Miss Helen, after all.'

The girls stole furtive glances at him and her during tea-time. Miss Helen was very conscious of their gaze upon her, but she bore herself with even more dignity than usual, though when now and then she looked down the room at them her eyes were as full of laughter, with just a touch of satisfied pride, as were the captain's.

'You know, you all looked dazed!' she told them afterwards. 'It was very nice of you, and most satisfying! I had been looking forward to the effect Jock would have on you all, and I must say I wasn't disappointed! Nor was he! He ought to have been shy, but I really think he enjoyed it!'

In every corner of the room the girls were listening to his voice, which was extremely noticeable in that feminine atmosphere.

'So jolly and Scotch!' said Romany excitedly.

‘Was it? I didn’t notice. It just seemed home-like and comfortable,’ Libby Mackenzie laughed. ‘And, anyway, you ought to say Scottish, not Scotch.’

‘Why?’ queried The Gipsy; but Lib could not explain the subtle point, and was too much interested in the visitor to attempt it.

When tea was over, but before Miss Robinson had given the signal for the girls to rise, Miss Helen stood up, a wave of colour in her face, her eyes laughing, and embarrassed. ‘Girls! In recognition of the fact that matric. is safely over, and that our candidates have all come up to the scratch, and have, we hope, done as well as we all expect, we are going to excuse to-night’s prep., and Captain Macgregor and I propose to hold a reception in the playing-field. So any one who would like to be introduced is invited to come along.’

‘Camp Potawatomi first, of course,’ added the captain unexpectedly, after listening to his bride’s speech with much amusement. ‘And particularly the girls who have a cousin in the Argylls. It’s likely I’ll know him—unless he’s in Egypt, of course; some of our chaps are.’

Then he gave his arm to Miss Helen, and the girls, keenly anxious to follow, were stricken with sudden shyness and all hung back, urging some one else to go first. The general opinion was that Lib Mackenzie should lead the way, at which she was very indignant.

‘I’m the newest girl in the school! Let Rowena go first! Or Rose! She’s head girl!’

But even Rose and Rowena were shy to-night, and it was Watanopa, The Adventurer, who took the first plunge. ‘I am Camp Fire, if I haven’t a cousin in the Argylls! We can’t possibly let them wait for us out there! It will look as if nobody wanted to see him! You know you’re all dying to go, if only somebody will go first. Come on and back me up, then!’

‘You always say you like making new friends!’ The Beaver protested feebly.

‘They won’t mind waiting a minute or two alone! Don’t you worry about that, Watanopa!’ The Mountain laughed. ‘All right! We’ll back you up! I’m dying to see what that thing is he’s got stuck in his stocking!’

‘It’s his skean dhu!’ Libby cried indignantly.

‘Oh, but I want to see the whole of it! And that furry thing with the brush tops hanging down in front!’

‘It’s a good thing my father can’t hear you!’ Libby laughed, at this description of the gorgeous sporran.

The Camp Fire followed Watanopa in a shy but eager crowd. The Adventurer went pluckily forward across the grass. ‘I’m not the one with the cousin, but I belong to Camp Potawatomi,’ she explained. ‘They’re all dying to come, really, but they don’t quite like.’

‘Bravo, Watanopa!’ Miss Helen laughed.—‘This is The Adventurous One, Jock. You know all the names already.’

‘I only have to fit them to the right girls,’ the bridegroom laughed.—‘Now what are you, Miss Watanopa? Torch-Bearer? Or Blue Bird?’

‘I don’t think Miss Helen’s told you about us very nicely, if you can ask a silly question like that,’ The Adventurer retorted with spirit. ‘But perhaps she had other things to write about! I’m only a Wood-Gatherer yet.’

‘Perhaps she had,’ the captain chuckled. ‘And even Wood-Gatherers can be cheeky, apparently. Won’t you introduce me to some Fire-Makers? I’m pining to meet a Fire-Maker!’

Watanopa’s arm shot out as she pointed to the various girls, and as she named them Captain Macgregor put an end to their embarrassment by going up to each and insisting on shaking hands. ‘Nyoda!—Yallani!—Opechee!—Romany!—Killooleet!—The one with hair like chestnuts is Tanpa, our Torch-Bearer; and the copper-coloured one’——

‘Is Libby, who has a cousin in the Argylls!’ said the captain promptly. ‘I’m quite sure this is Libby? I thought so! And what’s his name? And which is his battalion?’

‘The Fifth,’ Libby said shyly but proudly. ‘He was in Gallipoli, and was wounded in the great charge; but he’s all right again now, and out in France. His name’s the same as ours—Mackenzie. Oh, do you know him?’

‘Willie Mackenzie? I rather think I do! I can tell you plenty about him. He’s attached to our lot. We were great chums till I got hit.’

‘Oh, let me find Tibby!’ cried Lib, radiant and proud. ‘She’ll want to hear too. We haven’t seen him for months. And you’ll have to go and see father and mother!’

Captain Macgregor ought no doubt to have been shy and self-conscious, for he was certainly the only object of interest to every girl in the school. But he was not shy. He paid several visits before the wedding, and enjoyed them all immensely. He was careful to come only at times when the girls would be free, and although at first it was they who were shy, this very soon wore off. Miss Helen laughed often at sight of him sitting out on the playing-field, one bare knee cocked over the other, cigarette in hand and Grey Edward on his knee, a ring of eager girls on the grass at his feet, others hanging over his chair or standing three-deep to listen to his stories, Great Britain wandering round and sniffing him with much satisfaction. The girls soon knew all about the charge of the Fifth Argylls in Gallipoli, of which he was justly proud, though the glory did not belong to his own battalion; of the Argylls in the advance posts on the Menin road; and of a hundred other incidents in their history.

The little ones were as much fascinated as the seniors, and he took care that they should have their turn. The Queen’s small sister, known very naturally as The Princess, and the tiniest Blue Bird in the school, would have sat on his knee for hours if her sister would have allowed it. But Renée would not hear of it.

‘And hide that gorgeous sporran? Not likely! You sit on the ground, my dear kid! And Little Grey too!’

The captain promptly unstrapped the sporran, which the girls no longer called ‘the furry thing with the brush tops,’ and hung it over the back of his chair, where it was immediately seized by The Robin and handed round for closer inspection. ‘Come along up, Princess!’ said he, and the child chortled with delight.

‘That infant will burst with pride if you take so much notice of her,’ Renée told him severely.

‘You’re jealous, Queen. You can come too, if you like,’ he suggested. ‘I won’t tell the Guardian!’

‘Uda, there’s no doubt your Captain Jock is having a good time!’ Rowena remarked that evening. ‘I think the sooner you marry him and take him away and look after him the better!’

‘Oh, but we don’t want him to go!’ laughed The Rainbow. ‘We want to keep him “for always and always and always”!’

‘We’ve quite forgiven you for wanting to leave us, now that we know how jolly he is!’ Killooleet added.

‘Thanks so much!’ said the Guardian, with mock solemnity. ‘That’s a great relief to me! I rather thought you would! Now I can get married with an easy mind!—Are you sure you don’t hate him any longer, Yallani?’

‘I love him!’ said The Mountain solemnly. ‘And so say all of us!’

‘Even Little Grey loves him!’ The Beaver remarked. ‘He told me so in a whisper yesterday.’

‘That’s only because Captain Macgregor said he was so beautiful! Grey Edward loves any one who says he’s beautiful,’ The Robin retorted.

‘ ’Tisn’t, then! He likes the bare knees. He says he *never saw* a gentleman dressed like that before. He wasn’t quite sure whether it was a gentleman or a lady at first.’

‘He loves the sporran, anyway,’ Killooleet laughed. ‘He’s inclined to think it’s a relation of his. He sniffs it whenever he gets the chance.’

‘Thinks it’s his little cousin! He is a silly!’ jeered Opechee.

‘There’s one thing he doesn’t like about him, though,’ The Beaver added, ‘and that’s his boots. He says he *never saw* any boots as big as that before.’

‘Well, there certainly isn’t another pair as big in this house! Considering where Little Grey lives, I think it’s no wonder if he’s rather astonished at a soldier’s boots,’ The Mountain laughed.

‘He swears at them something fearful, so I think he’s scared of them. It makes me blush to hear him!’ said The Robin. ‘I’m sure Captain Macgregor never heard such language in the trenches.’

‘All the same, he likes him, boots and all, just as much as all the rest of us do, Uda,’ Tamakwa assured her.

‘If he has Grey Edward’s approval, all is well!’ the Guardian said solemnly. ‘I’d have had to think twice about marrying any one our mascot didn’t approve of!’

CHAPTER XXVII.
THE NEW GUARDIAN.

So delighted were all the girls with Captain Macgregor that Camp Potawatomi would have been quite willing to invite him as a visitor to the ceremonial meeting held the night before the wedding.

But, to their surprise, Miss Helen objected. 'Perhaps you will let him see a meeting later on. He would enjoy it, I know. But this is my last meeting, and I want it to be just for ourselves. I want to be alone with you all once more. If we come back together early in next term, as I hope may be possible, perhaps you will invite us both to the Council Fire, if your new Guardian is willing. But let us have this one to ourselves.'

The girls were disappointed for a moment, but afterwards decided she had been right. That last meeting was a very private, intimate time, and they were glad to remember afterwards that no strangers had been present. Even the Guides were not invited to look on. The meeting was held in the big school hall; the windows were darkened, and the doors locked. When it was over, the hall was thrown open to the rest of the school, and the girls crowded in in evening dress and danced till bed-time—for who could settle to study with so much bustle going on, such excitement in the air, and a whole holiday next day? All the elder folks were busy; the gymnasium was full of wedding-presents; no one could think of anything but the morrow. And naturally there was no preparation-work to be done. So the girls danced and played for one another in turns, and incidentally kept out of the way of the busy grown-ups.

In deciding to have no visitors at the meeting, Miss Helen was thinking of the new Guardian as much as of herself. It was a fact which had never occurred to the girls, that Miss Betts was dreading the meeting just about as much as she was looking forward to it. She knew what would be expected of her, and she was anxious not to disappoint the girls, but behind her energetic manner she had a big strain of shyness, and she was nervous of their criticism. It was a real ordeal to her to dress up in Indian costume and face them for the first time. The feeling would wear off, she knew; but, as in everything, the first step was difficult. Miss Helen had discovered how she felt, and had done her best to talk her out of it, but without success.

'It's all very well for you, Helen Robinson!' 'Betty' said indignantly. 'You're tall and dignified and handsome at any time—yes, you are! In that costume you only look more stately than ever. I'm little, and I shall look silly, and every girl of them will look from me to you, and then they'll look at one another, and they won't need to *say* anything! It will be plain enough what they think!'

'Now, Betty, that's just silly!' Miss Helen said severely. 'If you were short and round and fat, you might talk so with some reason, perhaps. But you aren't. Since we're being so extremely personal, let me tell you that though you aren't tall, you're neat and dainty! You'll look all right in your gown—if you make it short enough! Don't worry, my dear! If you'll only let your hair down and do the thing in style, they'll be so pleased that they'll love you for ever. They're dying to know if you'll really go that far! I suppose you couldn't give them a hint, just to ease their minds?'

'I don't know myself!' 'Betty' said grimly. 'I know they want me to, but whether I can bring myself to do it or not I don't know, and won't know till the last moment, probably. There's another point! It's all very well for you there, too! You're very dark; you can look like an Indian. How would you like it if your hair was fair? It's simply silly! I don't know how it has happened; I suppose it's just pure chance; but there isn't a single fair girl in the Camp Fire.

They all seem to have gone to the Guides. Rowena Stanley is the nearest, but her hair is brown, if it is rather bright!'

'Chestnut! And she's Tanpa; you must remember their names, or you'll hurt their feelings dreadfully! But you're forgetting the latest recruit—Libby Mackenzie—Witawentin! She's fair enough; she'll keep you company! Once more, Betty dear, don't be silly! Your yellow plaits will be a novelty, that's all! You've got plenty of hair; be thankful you *can* wear it down! Some people couldn't!'

But in spite of Miss Helen's encouragement and teasing, 'Betty' was distinctly nervous when the evening of the meeting came. She had made her gown, but had not decorated it yet. Following the precedent expected of the girls, she intended to wear it plain until the holidays gave plenty of time for embroidering it according to certain vague ideas hardly yet formed in her mind. But she had borrowed a bead-loom and been taught its use by Uda, and in the secrecy of her own room had woven a symbolic head-band to complete her costume. This would have been a great comfort to the girls if they had only known it, but she left them in doubt even as to whether she intended to take a ceremonial name, and it was in keen anxiety they gathered for the meeting at one end of the darkened hall. One electric light at the upper end of the hall was turned on, but all the corners were dim and shadowy.

Miss Helen led them round the hall till they stood before the great hearth, Tanpa, Nyoda, and Opechee carrying the unlighted candles. They knelt and placed these in a big triangle on the floor before the empty hearth, the rest of the circle singing softly a chorus, 'Wohelo we sing!' Silence fell as the Guardian stepped out of her place and stood beside the candles.

'Camp Fire Sisters! This is my last night with you. To-night we welcome your new Guardian, and she must kindle our Fire. But first we have one member in our midst who has not been with us before.—Kathleen Clark, you have been one of our Blue Birds for a year, a little sister of our Fire. But a week ago you reached the age of twelve years, and it is your wish to become a Camp Fire Girl, under the name of Owaissa, The Blue Bird, or The Happy One. Will you promise to keep the Camp Fire Law?'

Kathleen, a younger sister of Aurora, The Dawn, repeated the Law and signed her name to it in the book, and once more the girls sang softly to welcome her.

'Now we will welcome our new Guardian,' Uda said quietly. 'Tanpa, will you, as our Torch-Bearer, bring her to our Fire? You will find her waiting in No. 6 classroom.'

A thrill of excitement ran round the circle as Tanpa, flushed and eager, went down the long hall and tapped on the door.

Miss Betts had commandeered the small room as a dressing-room, declining to wander about the stairs and passages in a fringed gown. She had dressed nervously for the ordeal, and had tied on her head-band and studied the effect critically; then, with sudden overwhelming realisation of the fitness of things, had thrown it aside, and hurriedly pulled out combs and hair-pins and let her yellow hair fall on her shoulders. 'At least it's in keeping with the rest! I may as well do the thing thoroughly! The other way does *not* look suitable!' she said to herself, as she hastily worked her hair into two thick braids, then tried the effect of the bead band once more. There was no doubt of it; worn thus, it was the finishing-touch to the costume. She realised that, quite apart from the wishes of the girls, the English style of hair-dressing with the Indian gown and head-dress was not effective.

She was hardly ready when the tap on the door called her to the meeting, and Rowena's voice gave the invitation. 'Please, Miss Betts, will you come and be our new Guardian?'

'Betty' was flushed with excitement and shyness, laughter and doubt, as she threw open the door and for one moment faced Tanpa and all the rest in daylight. Then she closed the door quickly, took Rowena's hand, and went forward to meet them. But the moment had answered all their questions, and Rowena's breathless and delighted, 'Betty, you are a dear!' was almost

drowned in the cheer with which the girls sprang to their feet, all anxiety gone from their faces.

Miss Helen went forward with hands outstretched to meet the new Guardian, while behind her Rowena's eyes danced triumphantly, and Yallani murmured to her neighbour Killooleet, 'I knew she would! She always was a sport! And doesn't it suit her jolly well?'

But Uda allowed no time for comments. She knew how Miss Betts was feeling, and hastened to plunge her into the business of the meeting. She raised her hand for silence, signing to the girls to sit down again, and led 'Betty' into the circle to a place beside herself at one side of the empty hearth. 'Will our Wood-Gatherers bring the wood for the Council Fire?'

It was already waiting in a corner, and was brought and laid on the hearth by all but Witawentin and Owaissa or those of higher rank. The Fire-Makers laid the fire, and Miss Helen lit her taper, and addressed Miss Betts. 'This is your sign of authority, as Guardian of the Fire.

'I hand the torch to you!
O bear it firm and true!
That every younger Camp Fire Girl
May look for light to you!

To-night yours is the honour of lighting the Council Fire!'

Miss Betts knelt and held the taper to the fire, while the girls joined in the 'Fire Song.' Then, as the flame leapt up and Miss Betts stepped back, Uda switched off the one light, and taking the taper again, handed it in turn to Nyoda, Opechee, and Tanpa, as she called on them to light the candles of Work and Health and Love.

When the ceremony was over and all were seated on the floor in a wide half-circle except the two Guardians, Miss Helen said quietly, 'Your new leader would like to take the name by which she will henceforth be known at your Council meetings;' and once more a thrill of excitement ran round.

Miss Betts was used to addressing them in class, but she was nervous to-night as she stepped forward and threw a twisted paper into the flames, on which she had written her old name. 'I, Anna Katharine Betts, bid you all take notice that I take Kiyugan to be my Camp Fire name. Kiyugan means "To open the door," and an open door will be my symbol. It is possible'—and she turned to face them, speaking earnestly—'that at times I may be able to open new doors to some of you, leading you into some realm of knowledge or attainment, some handicraft, or some new friendship with human beings or with books, which has hitherto been closed to you. But most of all I expect the Camp Fire to open closed doors for me. Several doors which are open to you are as yet closed to me. For instance, I am not by nature observant, and very many facts which are known to all of you are mysteries to me. I have never studied the world of Nature in any earnest way, and I shall have to work hard if I wish to win Nature honours. This morning I heard Tanpa and Witawentin talking of our next camp in the woods, and saying what a beautiful sight the sycamore-trees will be. They didn't say why, nor why the sycamores should be more beautiful in July than other trees, and I confess I have not the slightest idea. I gathered from their talk that these trees had been covered with flowers when you camped there in the end of May; but what is going to make them so striking now, in July? That door is as yet closed to me, you see.'

She looked a smiling inquiry at Rowena, who laughed. 'They'll all be hanging with tassels of seeds, and when they ripen they'll turn a most beautiful red. You can't help having noticed those by the church! They're a gorgeous sight!' she said reproachfully.

'It's possible to notice very little,' Miss Betts retorted. 'And it's a thing I'm particularly clever at—so far as outdoor life is concerned. I am not, of course, speaking of matters

connected with our everyday life;' and the girls, who knew how quick her eyes could be in class, laughed and looked at one another.

'Your camping experiences are another closed door to me,' Kiyugan continued, 'and there are others. I look to the Camp Fire to open many doors for me, and to enrich my life as I believe it is enriching yours. I have woven into my head-band a woman opening a door, and on each side have worked seven flames for our seven crafts, and three larger ones for Work and Health and Love. I suppose I shall work the same on my gown, unless any other idea occurs to me.'

While the girls looked with interest at the band of dark beads, and the seven flames in glowing colours, Rowena, after a glance at Miss Helen, came forward, two strips of beadwork in her hands. 'Guardian, these are a gift from us all. Each of us has worked her own symbol for your gown. If you will add the embroidery, your gown will be as pretty as Uda's.'

'And as full of meaning!' added Uda, while Kiyugan exclaimed in delight. 'It is the meaning even more than the appearance of my gown that I love.'

'Girls, are these really for me? There is no way I would like so well to decorate my gown, but I did not think it would be possible. I am not clever enough at beadwork yet to attempt anything so elaborate. It is more than kind of you all to think of it. I shall be as proud of my gown as I know Miss Helen has been of hers.'

'This is for you, Kiyugan;' and Uda placed a tiny silver pin upon her breast. 'That is your badge as Guardian. And these are your honours!' and she took up a long string of orange and green beads, and hung them round the new Guardian's neck. 'As Guardian, you have the privilege of claiming honours won in the past, though any girls joining us must qualify for them afresh.'

'Allow me to point out,' said Kiyugan, laughing, 'that my honours are so far nearly all for Home and Hand Craft, with a few for Business. My Health, Nature, Camp, and Patriotism I shall have to earn.'

'Yes; but don't they look lovely, those orange and yellow and green? And don't they finish off your gown?' Tanpa suggested. 'I'm sure you'll want some red and blue and brown and white ones now, to wear with them, Miss Betts!'

'Kiyugan!' said both the Guardians together.

'Oh, well!' Rowena laughed. 'We need a little while to get used to it!'

There were other honours to be given after the roll had been called. Libby received her first string with keen delight. Renée had qualified as Fire-Maker, so told her story, selecting Irene Petrie as her heroine, and describing her life among the zenana women of Kashmir, and receiving her bracelet when she had repeated the Fire-Maker's Desire.

Then Rowena came forward, a parcel in her hands. 'Uda, this is our Camp Fire wedding-present, and we all hope you and Captain Macgregor will be very happy, and eat lots of biscuits out of it.'

'Oh, girls! But you have all given me beautiful presents already!' and Miss Helen looked up from the pretty silver biscuit-box in dismay. 'You have given me your own work, and you know how I shall always prize your gifts. You shouldn't have spent your money too!'

'Oh, but we wanted to! You had to have a present from Camp Potawatomi!' they assured her.

'You have all been far too good to me. If I come to another meeting, I will fill this beautiful box with biscuits, and you shall all have some out of it.' Then, as they laughed, she declared the meeting closed, and bade the Fire-Makers lift up the candles and put out the fire. 'There is no time to-night to sit in council round our Fire. I have still much to do, and must not stay longer with you. Your summer camp will be held at Woody Dean, a week from now. In that, and in all the future of the Camp Fire, you know you will have my best possible wishes

for happiness and health and all success. Now we will sing together, and then I must run away.'

She was not allowed to go, however, until every girl had thrown her arms about her in a way which they declared would not be possible on the morrow. 'You'll be too fine, and there'll be too many other people. If we get kissing you, that will be all. So to-night we're going to hug you tight and hard!' The Adventurer warned her.

'The harder the better! Come along, one and all! And don't be afraid to come again to-morrow! I shall have time to spare for my bride's-maids! Aren't you all my sisters, for always and always?' laughed the bride.

She fled at last, and left them gathering round the new Guardian, begging for a closer view of her head-band and symbol, and uttering with eyes and faces, if not in words, their satisfaction that she had fulfilled all their hopes and justified their choice. She disappeared at last to dress, and the lights were switched on, the doors thrown open, and the impatient outsiders invited in to dance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
A BOARDING-SCHOOL WEDDING.

'Oh yes! We're all going to be bride's-maids, every one of us! We couldn't leave any one out!' the girls had said teasingly to Captain Jock, and had pretended to be hurt at his dismay.

They relented a day or two before the wedding, however. 'We don't all mean to walk up the aisle after her! We are going to be bride's-maids, or maids of honour, if you like that better. But we know she wouldn't want her wedding to look like a boarding-school out for a walk. So we're going to let Rowena and Rose walk behind her, and hold her flowers and gloves and all that, because Rowena's head of the Camp Fire, and Rose of the school. The rest of us will just look on.'

'The Guides wanted Vera and Ruth to be real bride's-maids too, because they're patrol-leaders,' Killooleet added; 'but we couldn't allow that. We told them they could have their turn when Madam gets married!'

'And they said they expected they'd be married themselves before that happened!' Watanopa added. 'Is there any one else you'd particularly like for a bride's-maid? Choose some one, if you like. We won't be jealous! Miss Helen could quite well have three or four, but that's about the limit, I think.'

'Wouldn't you like Little Grey?' inquired The Beaver. 'He'd look perfectly sweet trotting up the aisle after her. If you'll have him, I'll get him a big bow of white satin ribbon.'

'But he couldn't be a bride's-maid, Beaver! Of course, he might be a little page! I think he'd look rather nice in white satin,' The Mountain agreed.

'Couldn't we have Libby from Argyll, out of compliment to my regiment? Then when I go back I can tell her cousin she helped to marry me safely.'

'Good idea! Of course you shall have her.—Lib Mackenzie, you're to be a bride's-maid, do you hear?'

'Then Tibby must be one too,' Lib said promptly. 'I couldn't be one without her, and there's just as much reason for her as for me.'

'Oh no, there isn't! You're Camp Fire,' Watanopa argued.

'Still, she must have some one to walk with, and if she doesn't care for Little Grey, perhaps she'd better have Tibby,' said The Robin.

And as Libby was firmly decided not to walk up the aisle beside Grey Edward, Tib was chosen for Miss Helen's fourth bride's-maid.

The wedding-morning was warm and bright and breezy, and the atmosphere of excitement was over all the school. But as the girls dressed for the ceremony, there was a distinct feeling of discomfort among them. They were both looking forward to and dreading the day. They were losing Miss Helen, of course; but she had told them not to let that trouble them, as she would soon be back in their midst again, and remembering that, they hardly felt it to be more than a temporary parting. But they felt that this was hardly to be their day, as they would have liked it to be. If that had been possible, they would have had no guests but the necessary bridegroom, and liking him as they did, they did not feel him an outsider at all. That he should come and take Miss Helen away from them had come to be recognised as inevitable, and certainly for her happiness.

But the many wedding-gifts which had arrived during the last few weeks had impressed upon the girls the fact that there would be visitors, crowds of them, and that these would all want to gather round the bride and take up all her attention. They saw themselves crowded out

of what they considered their place by her side, and resented the coming of the guests to fill the house and grounds, even while enjoying the excitement of the occasion.

It was they rather than Miss Helen who insisted that to-day she must be approached with proper respect, and that a careful kiss on her cheek was the utmost any girl must dare to offer.

'We couldn't crush all your lovely whiteness, Uda,' Rose said reproachfully, when she remonstrated at their distant attitude. 'We hugged you last night, and we're glad we took the chance. No, it's no good; we couldn't do it again to-day. You're just lovely; but we daren't come too near you. And if Grey Edward or Great Britain so much as looks at your train we'll shake them into little bits, no matter how much they swear at us.'

'Little Grey would do his share of the swearing, anyway,' The Robin laughed.

This was on the playing-field after the ceremony, where the bride was holding her reception. She laughed. 'Well, then, here's a secret, Rainbow! We're going away at five o'clock, and at half-past four I'm going to have a cup of tea quietly in my own room. I'll take care to be dressed for real bear-hugs then, so any of you who care to may come along.'

'That's your last chance of a moment's rest gone,' Captain Jock laughed. 'You may have your cup of tea, Firefly, but it won't be a quiet one. Every single girl of them will be there. I think you'd better have it out here, where there's plenty of room!'

'I can't disappoint them altogether. If I'm cross and overtired afterwards, you must put up with me,' she laughed, as Nyoda sped away to pass the word round the Camp Fire.

'I'll do my best,' her husband promised.

The wedding took place in the beautiful old parish church to which Miss Helen had directed Libby's attention at their first meeting. The girls, in their white dresses, lined the path between the lich-gate and the porch, then crowded quietly in after the bride into the seats reserved for them. The rest of the church was filled with guests, most of whom had found rooms in the village or the neighbouring town; only a very few had been invited to stay in the school itself. But they all gathered there afterwards, and the girls kept to themselves in little groups, watching the strangers from a distance, until summoned peremptorily by 'Mrs Macgregor' to come and offer their congratulations. Then refreshments began to appear, and the girls thankfully found plenty to do, carrying seats out on to the playing-field and acting as waitresses.

As they had foreseen, it was impossible to do much more than look at Miss Helen from a distance; they made the most of that, however, and their eyes followed her continually as she greeted various old friends. But the Camp Fire Girls, at least, had found a new excitement in watching certain of the guests. While they were still waiting outside the church for the bride's arrival, Watanopa drew Rowena and Rose into a corner and whispered eagerly of a discovery she had made.

'Do you see that lot going in now? Those three with the schoolgirl and the older lady? I believe that's Miss Helen's first Camp Fire Guardian, with the four girls from America who started the Camp Fire in her old school! Those three are just about her age, and she's told us about them often enough, and how like Indians or Spanish girls they looked! See their hair and eyes!'

'One of them's as fair as Betty,' Rose argued.

'She always said the eldest was very fair,' Rowena said quickly. 'The schoolgirl is just like her! I believe Watanopa's right. I wonder if we could speak to that girl afterwards. It would be jolly to hear about Miss Helen when she was at school!'

Their surmise proved to be right, and the party of five, reinforced by three more girls whom Miss Helen had greeted joyfully and with much surprise, sat at a little table together and talked at a rate which told of some time of separation. Miss Helen joined them for a while, and there was much joyful talk and laughter. Then she went on to other friends, and the

youngest of the party, a schoolgirl of sixteen, with long fair hair tied back from her face, slipped out of the group and came straight towards Rowena and Rose and Libby. She held out her hand, and with laughing eyes showed a Wood-Gatherer's ring and a Fire-Maker's silver bracelet.

'Oh! Then you did belong to Miss Helen's Camp Fire? We'd guessed it, but we weren't sure!' Their faces lit up in delight.

'Sure I do! Say, couldn't you talk to me? There's plenty of them running round with trays without you. She said you were Fire-Makers and Torch-Bearers, so I guessed I'd come along. Those others are chums, you know, but they're all too old for me!'

She laughed, and they laughed too, in relief at finding some one of their own age and standing.

'I'm Annabel,' she went on, with a complete absence of shyness. 'When I heard Helen was going to have a boarding-school wedding I said I'd come. I guessed there'd be some girls about. Say! What are you in the Camp Fire?'

They told her their names and ranks and symbols, and promised to show her their gowns presently if she would come into the house.

'I'm Toandoah, The Inventor, because they say I make up things for the rest to do. Aunty doesn't always like the things I make up! But the girls do; they do them, anyway.' Annabel had never in her life lacked followers. 'Aunty's our Guardian; she's over there talking to Priscilla. We hadn't seen those three for a year.'

'Tell us who they are!' the girls begged curiously. 'The fair girl is your sister; she's awfully like you.'

'The black ones are mine too,' Annabel said, with laughing eyes. 'Oh, I know it doesn't look likely, but they really are. Bernice and Melda are married, but their husbands are in France. Leonora's engaged to a boy in the Flying Corps, but he's on Home Defence at present.'

'And the other three? They're great friends; we can see that.'

'Oh, rather! They're "Camp Fire Sisters," you know. They were in the Camp Fire with Berny and the others when it was started. But they're all doing different things, and we haven't seen them for ages. It's awfully good luck, their all turning up here! I thought Melda would yell when she saw Dorothy Ann come into church! Katharine Mayne, the pretty, fair-haired one talking to Leo, is a V.A.D. nurse; Dorothy Ann, next to her, drives a motor for Flying Corps officers, and has a bully time. Priscilla's English mistress in a girls' school; she's a B.A. Yes, she is young for it, isn't she? She's as old as Helen Robinson, though. Our girls are busy too, of course. Melda cooks in a hospital; she learned her cooking in our Camp Fire! Leonora works at a canteen; Berny has a baby boy, so she's stuck at home, poor thing! She doesn't seem to mind, though, and the baby's a dear. Now tell me about your summer camps! Helen told me to ask you. And which is your new Guardian?'

'The little fair one over there. There's not a great deal of her,' Rose said solemnly, 'but she's great fun. Her name's Kiyugan.'

'And does she open doors?' Annabel was evidently familiar with the symbol-book.

'She's going to. And she says we're to do it for her. We've only had her since last night, you know. We stuck to Miss Helen as long as we could.'

'Well, I guess! Now tell me all your names! Have you a Minnehaha? Dan—that's Dorothy Ann over there—was Minnehaha, and she told me to ask if you had one, and bring her along to shake hands.'

'We haven't one,' Rowena laughed. 'I'm sorry to disappoint her.'

'What an original Camp Fire! I suppose Helen is still Uda? She was with us. Oh yes! I heard her husband call her "Firefly" just now.'

‘Her husband! Doesn’t it sound queer? Bother him! I suppose he is, though,’ Rowena laughed.

The presence of lively Annabel made a great difference to the girls in their enjoyment of the wedding-day. Annabel was never at a loss for words, and she stood in awe of no one, answering even Miss Robinson herself with all the assurance of one fully grown-up and ‘out.’

‘I don’t believe that Annabel has ever been “in,” if you ask me!’ Yallani murmured.

She was introduced to the camp mascots, and admired Grey Edward because she agreed that it was evidently the proper thing to do and he so obviously expected it. But she fell completely in love with Great Britain, and knelt to put her arms round him and kiss his ugly nose, till Killooleet murmured something about ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ and the Guides took her to their hearts at once. It was not often their mascot was hugged and cuddled, and the beautiful Edward only looked at from a distance. They almost forgave Annabel for being Camp Fire instead of a Guide, and thought of her ever afterwards as ‘the pretty girl who kissed John Bull.’

Annabel went indoors presently with a big party of attendants, when she could tear herself away from Great Britain, and after inspecting the wedding-presents, and examining critically, but with final approval, the gifts made by the girls themselves, and particularly the beadwork, she disappeared upstairs with them, and spent a happy, if noisy, hour in the dormitories, being shown gowns and head-bands.

‘It’s been a bully wedding!’ she said exuberantly to her aunt, as they drove away after the bride had gone. ‘It’s “some” Camp Fire Helen’s started in that school! Their gowns and beadwork are ‘most as good as ours!’

‘I hope yours will go as well, Heather,’ said her aunt, Miss Tarring, to the brown-haired girl, Priscilla.

‘I’m hoping great things for it. The girls are all very keen, and we’ve made a good start. We go out on the moors a great deal. The moors take the place of the island on which we used to meet,’ Priscilla smiled.

‘We meet there still. That island has seen a good many ceremonial meetings and Council Fires by now.’

‘I said it was just the place for a Council Fire the first day I saw that island,’ said fair-haired Bernice. ‘Say, aunty, I’m going to bring Baby to a ceremonial meeting some day! You’d better adopt him as a Camp Fire baby!’

‘I feel like the grandmother of all these Camp Fires my old girls are starting,’ Miss Tarring laughed. ‘And of course I’m grandmother to your baby, Berny!’

‘These girls camp in the woods,’ said Annabel. ‘They have the Guides too. I saw some of their uniforms and badges. I wish we could have Guides as well as the Camp Fire!’

‘You want a lot, Annabel,’ her aunt laughed. ‘None of these girls try to do both. They have to choose between the two.’

‘Oh, well, if I had to choose I’d stick to the Camp Fire! The Guides are good business, but the Camp Fire’s *It*!’ Annabel said with conviction.

And her elder sisters and their friends, to whom the Camp Fire had meant much in their day, and still meant much in the way of firm and lasting friendship, laughed and agreed with her.

‘I’m jolly glad to know those girls of Camp Potawatomi!’ Annabel added.

With a final rousing cheer from the crowd of girls gathered round the big school gates, and in a shower of silver-paper hearts and horse-shoes, ‘Miss Helen’ left home on Captain Jock’s arm, and the girls turned disconsolately in to face the thought of life without her.

‘Mrs Macgregor! I can’t get used to it!’ Rowena groaned.

‘We never shall. If we didn’t like him it would be fearful,’ said The Rainbow. ‘But he’s so awfully jolly that we can’t be too sorry when we remember she’s gone with him.’

‘I wouldn’t have minded doing it myself!’ The Mountain laughed.

‘Talk about “Ups and Downs”!’ Rowena said dismally to Libby that evening, as they sat on the banks of the playing-field, pretending to study for the morrow. ‘I suppose we have been having an “Up” time lately, but I certainly feel “Down” enough now! Think of going back to lessons to-morrow! Ugh!’

‘Oh, well, it’s been an awfully jolly wedding!’ Libby said comfortingly.

‘And there’s the camp next week!—Buck up, Tanpa!’ said The Rainbow cheerfully. ‘There’s always something to look forward to!’

‘That’s living up to your name, anyhow, if you can look forward to-night, Rainbow!’ Rowena laughed. ‘I feel as dumpy as a feather bed.’

‘Too much wedding-cake!’ said Nyoda solemnly. ‘I told you it would make you ill!’

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE COURT-MARTIAL.

The Guides' interest in Miss Helen's wedding was only second to that of Camp Potawatomi. They did not stand in quite the same relation to her; they were not her own girls, not her 'Sisters;' but they had all been very fond of her, and the whole school, from Rose to the youngest Blue Bird in the Kindergarten, missed her intensely. Fortunately the midsummer camp was fixed for the following week, and after that would come the school exams. and then the holidays, so there was no time for moping.

Ribby and Perks had been interested in the wedding also, but not to the extent of going to church on a week-day. The wedding-day was a Wednesday—'Jolly thoughtful of the Guardian!' said Ribby, with approval—so they were not at school. But it was really more the stir and excitement in the village which appealed to them than the wedding itself.

They sat on the high wall of their own garden opposite the church, and watched the stream of motors and carriages and the crowds of arriving guests. As a matter of fact, they had seized this unique opportunity for a game of statistics; Ribby was 'collecting' motor-cars and gentlemen in top-hats, Perks counting carriages and men in khaki. Neither attempted to count girls or ladies; they would have had no time for anything else. The arrival of a big motor filled with officer friends of the bridegroom gave the victory in that section to Perks; Ribby's top-hats were nowhere.

The boys watched the two rows of white-clad girls waiting in the churchyard for the bride, and spent the time of the ceremony in pelting the crowd of staring village children with ripe gooseberries—a form of assault which gave much internal satisfaction to the assaulted ones, and did little outward harm. Then the white-clad throng surged out again to wait for the bride, and presently showered rose-leaves upon her, while small Blue Birds strewed daisies from the Downs in her path. When the principal guests had driven off, the girls followed them in a delightfully uncrocodile-like crowd, hastening down the street and up the school lane to take their turn of kissing the bride and congratulating the captain. Libby walked with Rowena and Rose, and received a friendly wave from the boys on the wall; but Tib, released from her proud position among the chief bride's-maids, hooked her arm through Samanthy's, and Ribby's greeting to them was an undeniable wink. Tib waved her hand, ignoring the grimace, but was too busy comparing notes with her friend to take any more notice of the boys. Sammy did not seem to see them.

Tibby realised this afterwards. 'Sam, haven't you squared up with Ribby?' she asked anxiously.

'No!' Sammy said grimly.

'But he said he was sorry. You ought to!' Tib remonstrated.

'He hasn't shown he's sorry. It's easy to say things.'

'Well, it will be the holidays in three weeks. What are you going to do then?'

This fact had been troubling Sammy. She foresaw unpleasant possibilities if she was not on speaking terms with the boys by the time school was over, but she was not prepared to give way too tamely. It was partly obstinacy which made her hold out now. She had called Rowena 'soft' for accepting Ribby's apology so quickly, and she could not very well afford to appear soft herself.

'If I could only get even with him somehow!' she confided to Tibby. 'You know, he's never *unsaid* the things he said to you about the Guides! He did say to Weena that the Camp

Fire was jolly good, and better than he thought; but he just said "Sorry I got your monkey up, Sam!" to me. What's the good of that? He still thinks we're silly!'

'You don't know what he thinks,' Tib argued feebly.

But Sammy did know, or thought she did. She talked to Dorothy and Phyllis and Cicely, and among them they concocted a plan, and went to their patrol-leaders for help.

There were several new features in the camp when the tents were again pitched beneath the red-tasselled sycamores, and the flag hoisted by the Guides, and the camp fires lit by Tanpa and Nyoda. Lib and Tib were members now, part of the crowd, living under canvas with the rest, to their great content and enjoyment—after the first night was past. That was rather an eerie experience, certainly, and they did not sleep much, but jumped every time an owl hooted or other night-bird cried, in spite of their evening song to 'Mammy Moon' to guard the camp when the fire went out. But Tib had a corner in Vera's tent, and Libby slept with Dawn and The Adventurer and The Beaver, and Grey Edward, who condescended to share his 'bestest friend's' bed at times, and neither was really nervous.

The presence of 'Betty' in place of Miss Helen was curious, of course; but Kiyugan had 'made good,' as The Rainbow said, and had justified The Mountain's opinion of her as being 'sporty.' She had entered thoroughly into the life of Camp Potawatomi and the interests of the girls, and they were growing more fond of her, and were all on more familiar terms, than they would have believed possible before she let down her hair and sat with them on the floor beside the candles. They were opening doors of Nature Lore and Health Craft to her, and she had already led several of them into new handicrafts, and new experiments in the way of camp cookery which were an improvement on their usual menu. To the delight of all, she insisted on passing the tests for Fire-Maker's rank, saying she wanted a 'Wohelo' bracelet like theirs, and the girls who had already qualified examined her in the various requirements with great glee, and voted her 'a regular sport' to take so much trouble which was not required of her.

The work volunteered and insisted upon by the girls, in their desire to 'Give Service' to their hosts at Woody Dean, was not weeding this time, but fruit-picking, and Mrs Mackenzie accepted their offers gratefully, and did not attempt to discourage them. The garden was full of ripening fruit, and she was at her wits' end to know how to use it. So, before breakfast and in the evening, merry parties of Brownies invaded the kitchen-garden, and gathered currants and gooseberries, rasps and strawberries—some for Mrs Mackenzie to make into jam, some for bottling, and always some to carry home for their own next meal. The camp never lacked fresh fruit, and some of the Camp Fire Girls even managed to beg a little sugar and make jam over their camp fire, thereby winning Home Craft honours and delighting both their companions and the Guides. With Watanopa's home-made scones and Tamakwa's home-made jam, and dishes of fresh strawberries always on the table, among the roses brought by Witawentin when she went in to see her mother, and arranged by their namesake The Rainbow, the supper-cloth spread on the grass was very festive.

Samanthy's patrol-leader approved and improved her plan, enlisted the sympathy of the Guides by repeating those irritating words, 'Playing soldiers,' and chose a day when Miss Fenton was detained at school preparing examination papers. It was a Wednesday afternoon, and Ribby and Perks were riding over the Downs to Eastwood, to inquire for their grandmother—a fact Sammy had made sure of during a brief visit home a few days before.

As they rode home during the early evening, free-wheeling downhill, they were suddenly brought to a stop by a row of girls in blue, who sprang from behind an old wall, and, linking hands, formed a chain across the road. The boys could not well ride them down, so perforce had to dismount.

Before they could ask what was the meaning of it all, two tall girls in uniform came forward, and one clapped her hand on Ribby's shoulder. 'You are under arrest,' she informed

him. 'I advise you to come with me quietly, and warn you that anything you say may be used as evidence against you.'

Ribby's eyes danced. 'Oh, I'll come! But I want to know the meaning of this—er—outrage!'

'Take charge of the prisoner's bike, corporal.' His captor made no other answer. 'You'—to Perks—'may go home.'

'No fear! I'm coming to see the fun!' Perks said promptly, and wheeled his cycle up over the grass, his eyes snapping with glee. 'Keep your pecker up, old man! I'll take home a message, in case you're never heard of again! "Break the news to mother!" you know. Give me your last words. I'll write 'em down. Any farewells for the fellows? Say! Hadn't you better make your will? We'll remember you died a soldier's death, anyway.—Can you play the "Last Post"?' and he turned to Dorothy, who wore her bugle slung over her shoulder. 'Can't have a military funeral without the "Last Post." The corpse would be dreadfully hurt.'

The patrol-leader was conducting the prisoner up over the top of the Down, the rest of the girls following closely at their heels. They had meant to look very severe and business-like and soldierly, but it was not easy with this kind of thing going on in their rear. Several could not resist the temptation to look round, and then the sight of Perks's impish grin, and the hideous wink with which he favoured them, upset them entirely.

Ribby's persistent questions had brought no answer by the time they topped the Down. Here was a shallow hollow, with a round dew-pond; on the sloping hillside were seated the Guides of the second patrol, the heather-coloured ribbons of purple and white on their shoulders. They sat in orderly lines, and the Oak-Leaf girls joined them, except a few who stood as guard around the prisoner.

'Court-martial!' chuckled Ribby, deeply impressed, but trying not to show it. 'I say! You're doing the thing in style, aren't you?'

'It's the Court of Honour,' said the corporal rebukingly, and hoped he knew too little of the Guide regulations to protest that the Court was not properly constituted, as the Guide-Mistress was not present. As Ribby was quite ignorant on the point, they were safe enough.

Vera, who had captured him, went to the place reserved for her in the middle of the front row beside Ruth, the leader of the Heather Patrol.

Ribby's eyes danced again as he faced the rows of serious girls. 'Well, what's the charge? What have I done to deserve this—this honour? Am I to be shot at dawn?'

'Who brings a charge against the prisoner?' asked Vera, as Perks laid his cycle on the grass, and sitting down beside it, clasped his hands round his knees and watched critically.

'I do!' Sammy jumped up from her place, and saluted the judges.

'Tr-r-r-raitor! Traitor to your house and home!' hissed Perks instantly.

Ribby grinned; he had been prepared for this. 'Right-o, Samanthy!' he said pleasantly. 'Just you wait till the hols., old girl!'

'What is the charge against the prisoner?' asked Vera severely—very severely, for she had difficulty in keeping her face straight.

'He made fun of the Guides, to girls who didn't know anything about us. He said we *played soldiers*!' Sammy's voice was tragic.

'The secret is out!' proclaimed Perks, in a loud stage whisper. 'The dread truth is known! Off with his head! Away with him to the lowest dungeon!—Good-bye, old chap! You're done for now! I'll tell the fellows how you died!' and he flourished an immense handkerchief and prepared to weep. 'Any last message for mother? I'll put flowers on your little grave. May I have your bike? My front tire's wonky.'

'Silence in the Court!' thundered the judge, with all the voice she could command, for several members of her patrol showed signs of becoming hysterical. 'Suppress that

interrupter!—Call your witnesses,' she said to Sammy, as Perks buried his head in his arms and sobbed noisily.

'I'm a witness. He said it to me.' Tib came forward and saluted, looking troubled. 'But I don't think'— —

'S-s-sneak!' hissed Perks. 'Oh, faithless sneak! Shoot her at dawn too, please—er—lieutenant-colonel!'

'I'm *not*!' Tib turned on him, flaming anger in her face, for the accusation hurt her with a force no one present could understand except herself and the boys. 'I'm not sneaking! He said we could tell! He said he'd like us to. Libby was there too, and she heard him. I'm *not* a sneak!'

Ribby understood her wounded eyes and shaking voice, and came to the rescue, forgetting himself for the moment in her distress. 'No, she isn't a sneak. I did give her leave to tell. Ask her pardon at once, Perks, you ass!'

Perks solemnly grabbed up a handful of sand and gravel, and shook it over his head and into his hair. 'Dust and ashes!' he proclaimed dramatically. 'I forgot; he did say she might tell. She isn't a sneak, after all.—But you needn't get the wind up so quick, old girl!'

'I'm not a sneak!' said Tibby stormily again, her lips still quivering. No other accusation could have hurt her so acutely.

'You may go, witness,' said Vera; and Tibby saluted again and went back to her place.

She was teased later on by her friends, who wanted to know why she had cared so much about Perks's insinuation; but she never told them, and they never understood.

'Prisoner at the bar'— — began Vera majestically.

'Bar? Where is it? I don't see any bar! Fetch me a—a whisky-and-soda, or a bottle of gingerbeer!' murmured Perks. 'Little me's thirsty! I always said there ought to be bars up on these Downs!'

'Have you anything to say in your own defence?' the judge demanded hastily.

'Heaps!' said the prisoner promptly. 'I apologised. That ought to have been enough. Look here!' and he warmed to his explanation. 'This Guide business is a boys' game, however you look at it. I know you say you aren't playing you're boys, and maybe you aren't; but all the same it's a boys' game. Bits of it may be good enough for girls, but it's copied from the Scouts, and you can't say it isn't. Well, why can't you be like boys all through? If I'd riled a fellow, and I said to him, "Sorry, old chap!" that would be the end of it. He'd know I meant it, and he wouldn't keep bringing it up against me. I told Samanthy I was sorry weeks ago. Why can't she believe it, and say no more about it?'

Some of the girls looked uncomfortable. The prisoner had something to say for himself, after all.

Vera looked at Samanthy. 'Did he apologise?' she asked severely.

Sammy saluted. 'Yes, but only in a kind of a way. He didn't mean it. He just said, "Say, old girl, I'm sorry!" He never said he hadn't meant the things he said, or that he'd changed his mind about them. He was sorry for riling me, not for making fun of the Guides. He still thinks we're silly and not any good. I don't call that apologising.'

'You may have apologised in words, prisoner,' Vera said severely, 'but you evidently have not been able to make the—the plaintiff believe you were in earnest. Will you assure her now that you consider the Guides a jolly good thing for girls, and awfully useful? Then perhaps we may overlook your first rash and libellous remark.'

Ribby's face wrinkled up in enjoyment of the situation. Not for anything would he have brought matters to an end so tamely by giving them this satisfaction, and Samanthy an endless power to crow over him. 'But I don't,' he said blandly. 'I don't see the good of it. The Camp Fire's topping, but I don't see the use of the Guides.'

Sammy's face was triumphant. 'There!' she seemed to say, but managed to keep the word in by a great effort.

'In that case,' said the patrol-leader, as blandly as Ribby himself could have done, 'we can only be sorry for you. We can't, of course, hope to remove such dense ignorance all at once.' Ribby's grin broadened, and he chuckled enjoyably. 'I sha'n't attempt to argue with you, of course. We work just as hard as the Camp Fire, and know just as much; you can see our badges! We work particularly hard at First Aid, but you can't expect one of us to break a leg or sprain an ankle just to show you that we do know what to do if such a thing should happen!' She wondered at the sudden momentary gleam in Ribby's eyes, but it was gone in an instant, and Vera did not know him well enough to understand. Samanthy would have said instantly, 'Ribs has had an idea—a bad one, most likely;' but Sammy did not see.

Ribby's face was suspiciously grave again. 'It's very awkward,' he assured Vera seriously. 'What are you going to do about it?'

His tone nettled the patrol-leader. 'Fine you!' she said promptly. 'And if you don't pay up we sha'n't think much of you. Every one of us will despise you.'

'Worms!' proclaimed Perks instantly. 'Miserable—er—caterpillars!—Pay up, old chap, for the credit of your—er—er—what's the damage, though?'

'I fine you a box of chocolates, to be given to the Guides,' Vera said judicially. 'Now you may go. We have to get back to camp.'

Ribby's eyes danced as he perceived a new and glorious possibility. Not to pay up would have been tame and uninteresting compared with the joy he proposed to get out of the settlement of his fine. He saluted impressively. 'Right-o, colonel! I did libel you, sure enough. I won't back out.'

'Then you may go,' said Vera graciously.

'Take me back to home and mother! Send me back to Blighty! Come to me arms, me long-lost brother!' cried Perks dramatically. Then, as the rows of girls broke ranks and began to gather in groups, he shouted, 'Atten*tion*! Shun! Shoulder arms! Form fours! Quick march! One—two! Can't I be arrested too? Why should little me be left out in the cold?'

'What *you* want is a nursemaid!' Ruth, the leader of the Heather Patrol, said unkindly.

'Or a baby's rubber comforter!' Vera added. 'That would keep your mouth shut. Oh, you're quite beneath contempt!'

'He needs a muzzle!' added Samanthy, with withering scorn.

Perks did not wither easily, however. 'Yap! Yap!' He transformed himself without any warning into a terrier, and ran on hands and knees round her heels, yelping and yapping.

She jumped and screamed in a very undignified fashion, then turned on him angrily. But Ribby had taken him by the collar and jerked him to his feet. 'Come on, you silly ass! You've played the goat long enough! I've something topping to tell you!—By-bye, colonel! You shall have your chocs. all right!'

The boys rode off in close confabulation, and Samanthy turned ruefully to Vera. 'That "something topping" is something to do with us, I bet!' she said. 'We'd better "Be Prepared!" Ribby's frightful sometimes!'

'I like him. He's awfully good fun,' Vera said unexpectedly.

'But the little one's a frightful idiot!' added Ruth.

'Oh, that's just Perks!' said Samanthy.

CHAPTER XXX.
TESTING THE GUIDES.

Two evenings later Ribby rode to the camp, a huge white cardboard hat-box balanced on his carrier. It was the very biggest box he could coax from his mother. A more modest package, wrapped in brown paper, hung from his handle-bars. Perks was not with him, for reasons best known to himself and his head-master.

To Ribby's disappointment, the Guides' camp was empty, except for Great Britain in charge as usual. Ribby knew better than to take liberties with John Bull; he went to Camp Potawatomi instead, where there were plenty of girls sitting under the trees, busy at various handicrafts.

Libby and Rowena, The Rainbow and The Mountain, The Robin and Dawn, were all preparing currants and gooseberries for a big boiling of jam on Saturday morning. The Beaver had a lazy fit on, and sat beside the camp fire playing with Grey Edward, who had had a long night and day out visiting friends in every part of the village, and had come home exhausted, but not hungry. Evidently he had been well entertained at his various houses of call. He only wanted to sleep, and showed his resentment of Tamakwa's attentions by a tail which flapped in sleepy indignation at intervals.

As Ribby approached, Rowena held up a warning finger, dyed crimson with juice. 'Don't speak! 'she said warningly. 'Kokokoho's making up an Ode!'

The Owl, sitting under a sycamore-tree just behind them, growled in protest. 'Don't you believe her! I'm working for next week's exams., as she ought to be!'

'Oh, I thought it was an Ode!' The Birch Tree said mischievously.

'Swot! Isn't it enough for you to have matric. over?' The Rainbow said indignantly.

'He mustn't make a noise, though, or he'll wake the baby!' Dawn laughed, pointing to the sleepy mascot.

'Little Grey's very, very tired; you're please not to tease him to-day. He's walked about a thousand miles since last night,' said The Beaver apologetically. 'His little feet are almost worn out.'

'I saw him with our old ginger cat this morning,' Ribby laughed. 'They were having a pow-wow on top of the barn.'

'He's the tiredest little cat that ever was. You see, he has to show all the other cats his beautiful new collar; they're all wild to see it. They're frightfully jealous of his collar, and they've always been jealous of his beauty. He told me Miss Ginger says blue suits him best of all the colours;' and she dragged sleepy Edward into her lap and caressed his ears.

'Oh, draw it mild, Beaver! You're getting maudlin over that beast! Give us a rest!' The Robin cried indignantly. 'And just listen to him swearing! Little Grey's the best swearer I know.'

'You are teasing him, Beaver. If you love him so much, why can't you let him sleep when he wants to? Libby remonstrated.

'Because I like to feel him. He's so nice and warm and soft when he's sleepy;' and The Beaver sat crooning over her mascot as if he had been a baby.

'What do you want here?' Opechee turned to Ribby. 'I thought the Guides were your chums, not us?'

The girls all laughed, and Ribby grinned, seeing that they knew the story.

'And what *have* you got in that huge box?' Rowena demanded. 'I seem to have seen it before. Where's mother's best hat now?'

'She wants the box back, if poss.' Ribby swung it lightly by the string. 'You might rescue it, if you can, when they're done with it over there. It's my fine; it's chocolate.'

'My goodness! There'll be some sick Guides to-night! You must have plenty of money to spend, if you can buy chocs. at that rate in these days!'

'What's the First Aid for chocolate?' The Mountain laughed.

'It doesn't look very heavy;' and Dawn eyed the box suspiciously.

Ribby handed it to her. 'Take it over there for me, like a good chap. Not being in petticoats, I'd better not. The old boy might not understand, and I don't care to trust the Guides' tender mercies for dog-bite.'

'It *isn't* heavy!' Aurora took the box and looked at it curiously. 'It can't be full of chocolates!'

'Who said it was?' Ribby retorted.

'Oh!' Her face cleared in sudden understanding, and the rest of the girls laughed. 'Are you going to wait and see the result?' Dawn inquired, balancing the huge box on one finger.

'R*ather*!' and Ribby wandered round the camp; watched The Adventurer making scones for supper, for Little Grey's sake, as she explained; teased The Bee and Tchikash, who were writing a joint letter to Mrs Macgregor; helped The Queen and The Gipsy to gather firewood; carried water for The Clover-Leaf; and at last sat down to tease Grey Edward, whose inside rumbled noisily again at sight of him.

'He doesn't like boys!' Tamakwa explained politely. 'He told me so just now. He's never been used to them, you see. He's always lived with ladies—and such nice ladies, too! So please to go away and leave him in peace!'

'I often meet him 'way out on the Downs, miles from everywhere,' Ribby laughed. 'I believe he hunts rabbits.'

'No wonder he isn't hungry when he comes home! And no wonder his little feet are nearly worn through.'

'And no wonder he swears when you pull him about like that!' Opechee said severely.

The great box sat awaiting the Guides in the middle of their camp. Great Britain had sniffed it and retired in disgust. Presently the sound of singing—'Marching through Georgia'—announced the return of the patrols, and with a flourish of Dorothy's bugle they marched in.

Ribby, grinning expectantly, slipped out of sight behind an interested group of girls, who had all realised that some joke was afoot.

'Want to get behind me?' The Rainbow asked kindly.

'You'll do! Thanks; I did, rather. You and Weena are big enough to blot out anybody,' he retorted, but took care to be in a position to see the fun.

The Guides gathered round the box, which was addressed to Vera, keen anticipation of a feast in every face. The Camp Fire Girls could not see through the crowd as the box was opened, and The Mountain turned impatiently to Ribby, as for a few tense minutes nothing happened. 'Is there any chocolate in it at all?' she demanded.

'One,' Ribby grinned. 'It won't go round, I'm afraid.'

Vera had been forced to cut the string because the knot was so clumsily tied. She shook her head over it severely. 'Master Ribby Stanley ought to join the Guides! This is disgraceful! For a boy, too!'

'He can tie beautiful knots when he likes,' Sammy said indignantly. 'I guess he only did it to give you more trouble.'

'Sounds rather like him!' Vera raised the lid, and the crowd pressed round in anticipation. Folds of tissue-paper met their eyes; she lifted this out, and came to handfuls of shavings. 'They're very carefully wrapped up.' A note of doubt crept into her voice.

More paper, more shavings—but no chocolates; the girls began to laugh as Vera dived into the box and rummaged hastily in the wrappings. She brought out a match-box at last, and held it up for inspection, her eyes full of laughter. 'What a wretch of a boy!—Sammy Stanley, I'm surprised at your brother!—Girls, what shall we do?'

She opened the box, and showed one chocolate, carefully packed in cotton-wool. 'How he must have loved preparing this! I'm afraid we can't hand it round.—Here, Samanthy!'

'He's over there, with the Camp Fire!' cried Cicely. 'I saw him! He's hiding behind Rose and Weena!'

With a howl of wrath, both patrols came surging across the stream, bent on vengeance. Grey Edward fled into the bushes, spitting and swearing. Ribby took to his heels; he had already wheeled his cycle out to the road in readiness for this moment. Some of the girls turned back hurriedly to find their cycles and give chase.

But as Ribby rode off, he slipped his second parcel from his cycle and dropped it in the road. The girls fell upon it, and promptly forgot him. They carried it home in triumph, and found within it enough chocolates to go round that evening, though not enough to make any one very ill.

But the gleam in Ribby's eyes at the 'court-martial' had meant more than that. He broached his plan to Perks, inviting him to join, and received an emphatic refusal. 'Not much! Little me knows better! I'm not going to have a lot of girls messing about with me! And just you mind what you're doing, Ribs, old chap! You'll be too jolly clever one of these days!'

So Ribby went alone, and proceeded most unintentionally and speedily to verify Perky Jim's prediction.

He knew the Guides would be out on the Downs on Saturday afternoon; they always were. He rode in search of them, and presently came in sight of two small blue figures on green hill-tops on opposite sides of a valley, through which ran the road. Flags in hands, they were signalling to one another; to be correct, Samanthy was signalling to Tib, and Tibby thought she was signalling in reply. She had been having a lesson from her friend, and they had climbed the opposite sides of the valley to put the lesson into practice—without much success, however, as Tibby lost her head and forgot her alphabet at sight of Sammy's wildly waving flags.

Ribby rode slowly down the valley, on the turf, as usual. When nearly below them he proceeded to have an 'accident,' collapsing on the grass and lying still beside his cycle. He had practised this feat at home on the lawn, to the accompaniment of Perks's jeers, and believed he could fall off his cycle safely anywhere.

But just as he decided it was time to fall, and let himself go, he noticed a lump of chalk, half-covered with grass, sticking out of the turf. It did not look a choice spot to fall upon, and he tried hastily to save himself, failed, and fell very much more heavily and awkwardly than he had intended. And he found it not so difficult to lie still and wait for help as he had expected.

The girls on the hills could not fail to see him. Tib dropped her flags and came flying downhill; Sammy hesitated, suspecting a trick. But Tibby's frantic gestures took Sammy to her side very quickly, and two white-faced girls looked down at one white-faced boy, who was in no condition to explain what had happened. Blood was flowing from a nasty cut in his wrist, from some part of the cycle; his head was badly grazed by the lump of chalk; and one ankle looked twisted.

For the moment Ribby knew nothing. His plan had succeeded only too well. Unfortunately, the rest of the Guides had returned to camp, and these two could scarcely be expected to be of much help alone. Tib was, of course, almost useless yet; Sammy knew what to do, but she had had no practical experience, and she was only thirteen.

But she did not lose her head. Her training had at least helped her to think. While Tib stared, with quivering, frightened face, Sammy, without a word, knelt and tied her handkerchief very tightly round her brother's wrist, above the wound.

'It's not enough,' she said briefly. 'I can't pull it tight enough. Get me a bit of stick, quick; something that won't break. It mustn't go on bleeding like that.'



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But she did not lose her head. Her training had at least helped her to think.

'Shall I help you to pull it tight?' Tib quavered.

'*No!* Get a stick, quick, and don't talk. There, that will do!' Sammy thrust a pencil from Ribby's pocket through her knot and twisted it as a tourniquet. 'Now do as I say, Tib. Give me a roller bandage out of your haversack. And put your coat over him; he'll have an awful cold. "Protect from shock," you know. I can't help it if you get wet!' for the air was full of thin mist, which threatened rain before long. ' 'Twon't hurt you. There! That won't slip!' as she secured her tourniquet top and bottom. 'Now I'll put my coat over him too!'

'Do you want this?' Tib timidly offered a triangular bandage.

Sammy's hands were shaking, but she went on steadily to do what she could. It was not so easy to bandage a helpless patient as a 'play' one, but Ribby's forehead was bleeding, and that, too, had to be stopped. She sent Tib flying up the hill to the dew-pond for water—there were, of course, no streams on the Downs—washed and bandaged the cut as tightly as she could, and felt his arms and legs gently. As she straightened his right ankle, he opened his eyes with a gasp. 'Oo—ah! What are you doing, you idiot?'

'That's sprained or strained or something. 'Tisn't broken;' and Sammy bandaged it as tightly as she could, wetting her bandage last of all to tighten it still further.

Ribby had said no more. His head was aching, and he could only think slowly and painfully, but it was clear what had happened, and he realised ruefully that he was going to test the Guides more thoroughly than he had meant.

Samanthy looked up at Tib. 'Get our staves. We've got to get him home somehow. We'll have to make a stretcher; he can't walk.'

'Oh, I say!' Ribby had not bargained for this. He revived suddenly, and tried to sit up to protest, but turned giddy, and fell back helplessly.

'Don't be a donkey, Ribs!' his sister said sharply. 'And do lie still, or you'll loosen all my bandages. I don't believe half the knots are right, but my fingers went all shaky. You lie still; that's all you can do to help just now.'

'You kids can't carry me!' Ribby groaned.

'You can't lie here all night!' Samanthy said grimly.

Out of their coats and scarves and staves the girls hastily made an emergency stretcher, as they had been taught to do. Getting him on to it was a difficult task; they lifted his head on, and then his feet, and pulled and dragged and staggered under his weight. Ribby helped them at last by rolling on to the stretcher with many a gasp and groan.

He lay looking so white that Samanthy hastily sent Tib for more water, under the impression that he was fainting. Then she stood looking down at him, her face wrinkled with distress.

'You can't carry me!' jerked Ribby again. 'It's more'n three miles!'

'You can't lie here!' Sammy insisted.

'Couldn't you go for somebody?'

'Tib, there's a cottage round the corner. Fly down and see if there's any one there who could help.'

Tib flew, but in a moment Samanthy was after her. 'Bring something to cover him—a rug or a blanket or an old coat! He'll have bronchitis or something if he gets a chill; he always does.'

Ribby grunted wrathfully, but could not deny the fact, and was in no condition to expostulate.

Tibby returned in a very few minutes, carrying a rug, but alone. 'There was only a very old woman,' she panted. 'We'll have to carry him somehow, Sam. I'm awfully strong!'

Samanthy was bending anxiously over her patient. She had loosened her tourniquet, but the cut on his wrist was still bleeding, so she tightened it again, and kept repeating the process

at intervals on the way home.

Ribby was feeling very limp and broken, but he roused himself to protest when he felt the stretcher being lifted from the ground. 'I say! You girls simply can't' — —

'Shut up, Ribs!' Sammy said sharply. 'We've simply got to, and that's all about it. It's going to rain in earnest. You can't lie here till we fetch somebody. Perhaps we'll meet a man!'

'You'll kill yourselves! And you'll get awfully wet,' he groaned remorsefully, realising suddenly that his stretcher should have been protecting their shoulders.

'Can't be helped. And we don't care, do we, Tib?'

'Not a scrap!' said Tibby cheerfully, and trudged on.

'It's heaps easier to walk without our coats,' Sammy added philosophically.

'Awfully sorry!' Ribby said penitently.

'If you hadn't smashed up your bike I could have ridden down to fetch Vera and Ruth, but one wheel's all twisted up. What made you fall, Ribs?'

But Ribby suddenly became faint. He closed his eyes and groaned, and the girls looked at one another with scared faces, and asked no more questions.

It seemed a very, very long way to the camp, and they met no one, which was not surprising, as rain was now falling steadily. They were only small girls, and both felt as if their arms were being dragged out from their shoulders long before the Sycamore Wood came in sight. They were wet through, of course, but were walking too steadily and were too heavily burdened to feel the cold. Several times they had to stop to rest, or to change places in the hope that the change of position would ease their strained muscles. If Ribby needed punishment for the trick he had meant to play, beyond his various hurts and the probable spoiling of the early part, at least, of his holidays, he had it during that hour in the knowledge that two girls younger than himself were struggling so bravely on his behalf. He was very unhappy on their account, but Samanthy peremptorily stopped his apologies time after time.

'You didn't do it on purpose,' she said one time, as they paused to rest and get their breath.

Ribby's white cheeks grew red. But this was a matter better not confessed. The girls would only have felt worse if they had known the truth. It was long afterwards that, in a particularly teasing mood, he enlightened Sammy, and she heard for the first time that his 'accident' had not been all an accident. And Perky Jim's instant exclamation, when he heard of it, 'Didn't I tell him so, silly ass?' was heard only by their mother, who agreed that Ribby had better keep his own counsel on the point.

'I didn't see that beastly stone,' was all the explanation he offered at the moment.

But he felt guilty and uneasy, and knew he would have to ease his conscience sooner or later—though not by confession of his own foolishness. Samanthy's Guide training had stood her in good stead, and had saved him from much discomfort and possibly worse—at least, from the illness which he knew would have followed if he had had to lie out in the rain for some hours. She had not lost her presence of mind; she had 'been prepared,' had remembered, had done the right things—his bandages, the stretcher, and the rug, which gave such comforting protection from the weather, were proof of that. He had tested the Guides more thoroughly than he had meant or desired to do, and he acknowledged in his heart that she had come out triumphantly from the ordeal. Honesty demanded that he should admit it to her also, and Ribby was honest. He was still thinking it over, when a sigh of relief broke from Tibby.

'There's the wood at last! It's seemed a thousand miles, hasn't it, Sam?'

'Millions!' Samanthy agreed. 'But I'm glad we've managed it. I hope we've done the right things. He's awfully quiet. He looks rather bad, don't you think?' and she glanced down anxiously at her brother.

Tib looked over her shoulder. 'Perhaps he's asleep.'

‘Let’s get him there, anyway.’ Sammy’s tone was worried. ‘He can’t stand an awful lot. He’s been frightfully ill two or three times.’

‘Oh, stow it, Sam!’ Ribby was not too much exhausted to resent this to the point of protest.

Sammy laughed shakily in relief. ‘All right! I won’t rub it in. I’m glad you aren’t dead, Ribs!’

The last mile down the valley to the camp seemed even longer than those that had gone before. The Sycamore Wood was in sight, but never seemed to get any closer. But at last they stumbled into the camp, and put down their burden carefully before dropping, worn out, on the ground.

‘An accident! Call Madam!’ panted Samanthy.

‘We carried him—a thousand miles at least,’ Tibby added.

Miss Fenton and Miss Betts pushed their way through the crowd of excited, questioning girls, and took in the situation at a glance.

‘Miss Betts, will you take charge of these two girls?’ Miss Fenton said briefly. ‘Get them out of their wet things and rub them down briskly, and then get them into bed and give them some hot cocoa. If that doesn’t warm them thoroughly, send Libby to the house to borrow a hot-water bottle.’

She was examining Ribby’s bandages as she spoke, nodding approval of what had been done, but noting some of Sammy’s knots for future comment at a less critical time.

‘This is your work, Samanthy? You have done very well. We must get him home at once. Vera—Ruth—Rowena—Rose—and a few more of the tallest and strongest girls—get your macks and boots on. We will carry him home; he will get better attention there.’

‘Madam—his wrist! I couldn’t do that properly.’

‘No, I see. I’ll attend to that temporarily.—Get ready quickly, girls.—Samanthy and Tib, you have done very well. Where did this happen?’

‘Up by Hollis’s cottage, where we were signalling, Miss Fenton.’

‘You’ve had a long tramp.’ She saw that they were both exhausted. ‘Off to bed at once, both of you!’

‘He wants to speak to Sammy, Madam,’ said Dorothy and Cicely together.

‘Only for one moment, then. It isn’t good for either of you.’

Samanthy bent over her brother. Ribby was exhausted too, but anxious to ease his mind before they parted. He whispered, and she could just catch the words.

‘Thanks awfully, old girl! Guides—jolly good things! Sorry—didn’t understand! Topping idea!’

Samanthy drew a long breath of relief and satisfaction. ‘As good as the Camp Fire?’ she demanded.

‘Just as good. Both—jolly fine! Glad you and Weena belong!’ Ribby was bent on doing the thing handsomely, and he was very grateful to Sammy just now.

Sammy’s face was radiant. ‘That’s all right, old boy! I’m glad you understand! Now do go home and get attended to properly!’

She saluted Miss Fenton and followed Tibby to bed.

‘Jolly fine things for girls!’ whispered Ribby to Miss Fenton.

THE END.

[End of *The School of Ups and Downs: The Story of a Summer Camp*, by Elsie J. Oxenham [Elsie Jeanette Dunkerly]]