

# RANGER ROSE

By

ETHEL TALBOT



The CAPTAIN SERIES

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*Title:* Ranger Rose

*Date of first publication:* 1954

*Author:* Ethel Talbot (1880-1944)

*Illustrator:* Florence Mary Anderson (1889-1945)

*Date first posted:* September 29, 2023

*Date last updated:* September 29, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20230943

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.  
LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK  
TORONTO, AND PARIS

WRITTEN TO THE AIR OF  
TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS  
BY  
JOHANN STRAUSS

# Ranger Rose

## CHAPTER I

Rose was seated on the grass. Not on the smooth-turfed lawn at home where sometimes she lay flat, looking up at the rooks cawing overhead, listening to the flap-flap of their wings, and wondering what it must be like to be able to fly.

Rose had not even done very much walking for some time; she had spent most of the year lying out of doors, and only when the summer had really come had she been allowed to venture into the woods round the rambling old house at home.

It hadn't been a very happy year, until Rose had suddenly made up her mind to make it so. There were brothers in the holidays, of course; but to watch other people doing the things that one used to do so easily oneself, seemed somehow worse than anything else. Tom and Robin had been fearfully kind to Rose, of course, but—who wanted kindness, especially from brothers? as Rose had furiously thought. No climbing, no long walks, no fishing, no anything at all that Rose loved. Lessons for an hour a day, and those only from the organist's daughter, who was the only person who could be got, and whose replies to Rose's intelligent questions had made Rose want—though she somehow managed to keep from doing so—to scream.

She hadn't screamed, however; and the organist's daughter had grown extremely fond of Rose. Rose's brothers hadn't guessed, even in the first holidays, that it was gall and wormwood to Rose to be called "old lady" in a pitying tone, and to be helped about even by the chummiest brotherly arm. It was just because she minded being out of everything so fearfully that Rose had shut up like an oyster, and nothing could unwedge the unhappiness out of her because it was too far in.

After school! This!

For at school Rose had been so very happy; she had played centre forward in the Second Hockey Team at Roedale a year ago. She had made twenty runs not out on her last appearance on the Roedale Cricket Ground. She had been popular, too; she hadn't realized that, or thought of such things then, but she knew it now. "Just because it's all stopped," had thought Rose,

when the thick, waddy envelopes containing letters from the Roedale girls, written on Sunday afternoons and describing the life that went on there, had gradually grown less and less.

Of course it was natural. Rose knew that quite well. She was sure that some of them, anyway, talked about her still. For Stella, her best friend there, still wrote, and always said so. But even Stella's letters spoke of girls that Rose had never seen; of lacrosse teams which hadn't been in existence at Roedale in Rose's day; of new mistresses, and new ways and new "rags."

It had been during a "rag" that Rose had had her fall.

Everybody had dared her—everybody in the Middle School only, of course—to climb up on Speech Day and adorn the gym roof with a crimson-lettered injunction to the Roedale First Eleven to PLAY UP for ROEDALE! It wasn't such a very particularly high roof, perhaps, and Rose had brought the "dare" upon herself by boasting of what Tom and Robin had told her of their own deeds of daring at Repton. And what the boys could do, Rose could do; she had always done it.

She couldn't, however, do what the boys did now, and that by reason of her escapade. The roof had been slippery after rain; the red-lettered, flapping, and extensive strip of white linen had been difficult to manage in the wind. Also the cries of excitement from the Middles below had urged Rose on to do more than she truly knew was safe; and when the cries had changed to those of warning, Rose had suddenly lost her nerve.

"I could have done it alone!" had been Rose's first words, when she woke up in the school san, to find matron and the Head and a doctor standing round the san bed.

She had had to do most things alone since then.

Four weeks in a nursing home. Months and months at home, trying not to worry Mummy and Dad by even *looking* unhappy, and succeeding in that, at least—so she had thought. Parents, however, are not easily hoodwinked, though, truly, Daddy hadn't any *right*, thought Rose sobbingly, when one day he had walked straight across to the hammock where Rose was lying, and had pulled along with him a hammock chair and had sat down by Rose's side.

"Rosie, what's wrong?"

"Wrong, indeed!" returned his daughter, without turning her head. "I was just going to sleep. I always sleep in the afternoons; at least the doctor said I was to. So, Dad, you'd better go away."

“Are you missing the boys?” Her father had ignored her question, for yesterday Tom and Robin had returned to school.

“No, I’m *glad* they’re gone.” Rose’s tone had risen. “At least—of *course* I’m not, although——”

Rose had suddenly turned her face right away and sobbed.

“Daddy darling, go away. How on earth could you possibly understand?”

But he did, for all that. Rose’s father had served from beginning to end of the Great War. He had lost a leg, too, in his country’s service, and it was partly “not to make a fuss before Daddy” that Rose’s resolution had held firm for all this time.

He had played for Gentlemen at Lord’s in his earlier days; he took tremendous pride in the boys’ cricketing prowess, and he was also very proud of Rose as a budding sportswoman. All the time in matches at Roedale, Rose had somehow felt that she was “making it up to Daddy;” her aim had been, somehow, to play for the county “or something” later on. But she had been only fourteen then; she was nearly fifteen now. Between fourteen and fifteen, for Rose, lay a horrible gulf of sickness, sickness all the way; and her pride, which had begun gamely, was making her more miserable than she knew.

“Daddy, if you think I’m a funk—it will spoil—all of it. Personally, I don’t really care about being ill.” Rose’s chin had been set at a firm angle, but it was a shaky chin for all that. “And I’m not ill, so why——?”

“No, you’re much better. We all know that. But you’ve got a bit of time before you yet. Rose, when I lost my leg——”

“Oh, Daddy, don’t!” Rose lay still, with her eyes shut. Her father had never mentioned that happening to her before. She only really remembered him since the war, for she had been too tiny to understand things before he went away. Ever since the war Dad had seemed to her a scholar, reading greatly; strolling with the help of his crutch round the garden, taking interest in gardener’s work; taking tremendous interest in Rose and the boys and their doings; and taking interest also in the village boys and their cricket, the club for ex-service men in the village, and, well, in everything else. There was a kind of quiet strength about Rose’s father, which Rose realized more, perhaps, at this moment, when she lay tempest tossed and holding on to her pride in the hammock under the big red hawthorn tree.

“Why ‘Don’t’?” said Rose’s father. “Do you know, Rose, that I’d not change back now, I think, even if I got the chance.”

“Wouldn’t you?” Rose replied in a whisper, with her eyes shut.

“No, I wouldn’t. I am jolly glad I had the leg when the war came on, you know. Otherwise I couldn’t have fought. And I was jolly sick when I lost it, even though there was only a month of the war to run. And I felt jolly sicker, my dear, when I got home and felt myself a burden.”

“Burden, indeed!” Rose sat up. “*Burden!* You’d better let Mummy hear you, and—all of us.”

“A burden to myself, I mean,” her father went on. “Your mother took the loss, as I did, as being for the good of the country; and all of you have tried to make things up. But even your mother has never known everything.”

“Dad?” Rose turned over.

“I went through, Rosie, just what you’re going through. I tried to keep my courage to the sticking-point; but I failed. I failed in this way. I forgot that pride, all alone, is a jolly selfish thing. I didn’t show, perhaps, how much I missed the life I’d had. But I *was* missing it terribly; and I thought it was enough, at first, to go on missing it without complaint. But it wasn’t enough.”

“Why?” Rose asked in a whisper.

“Well, because the world is so full of other things to do. Cricket and sport are only part of things. One’s own family isn’t, and should not be, everything. To look back bravely even, if one looks back too much, is not wise. The thing is, you know, to make one’s world wider; and if one sets to, one can.”

“But how?” Rose lay still.

“Well. Effort after pride keeps one’s eyes on oneself a bit, doesn’t it? Get your focus enlarged. Look round. You think of me as a scholar, Rose, I believe; but, my dear, that particular joy of mine is an outcome of my loss. But the chief end and aim is to get in touch with people; and, more than all, people whom you can do something for. There’s the club, you know.”

“I know you started that. I know, of course, that you do loads,” said Rose. “But I can’t start clubs.”

“Think it over. Find out a way. You’re getting about now. True, you can’t do much, but you can do something. Things are more one’s own if one works them out. You’ve never been anything but independent; your mother and I are proud of that in you. But remember that the world’s big and that



you're necessary. And, by the way, here's a topping book for you to read and keep."

Rose's father got up. He dropped the *Little Flowers of St. Francis* into Rose's hammock.

"These red spiders on the hawthorn tree are growing too fond of running down my neck," he remarked. "I must speak to gardener about them."

Rose, left alone, opened the little book.

That was why, a few months after her father's present to her, she was seated on the grass outside the grounds of their rambling old house.

## CHAPTER II

But she wasn't alone. Though at first, during her first prowlings round the little wood, beyond which the doctor, as yet, had forbidden her to go, Rose had felt horribly out of the world, she didn't feel so now.

Then, holding the book that her father had dropped into her hammock, she had gone to sit under a tree and read it, wondering, at first, why ever it had entered his head to give her such a book as that.

She hadn't wondered for very long. After she had studied it, and loved it almost from the first word, the bigger world seemed to come round her almost at once.

Trees, birds, loppity rabbits, cooing wood pigeons—she had always known they were there, of course, but never as though they had been in any relation to her. But now, with the book in her hand, with the ways and words of St. Francis before her, the “little brothers” became somehow her own. “No bird did budge for him,” read Rose; wouldn't it be gorgeous to be like that? “Little sisters,” he had said to the birds, “strive your utmost to give praise to God!” Were their songs really that? Rose suddenly found that her wood was a wonderful, mysterious wood, full of friends, if she would but adopt them as “little sisters and brothers.” She had been suddenly lonely no more. Everything they did began to interest her; their ways and plays. Gradually they began to grow used to her too—the tall girl sitting almost always with her back against a tree.

“Coooo,” would call Rose.

“Cooooo,” returned the pigeons. As likely as not, too, pigeons and robins and all the more fearless birds would help her to eat any lunch that she might have brought. It was a day of thrills for Rose when a rabbit, instead of tearing past, seemed to sit suddenly on his tail to watch her for a moment.

Rose did not move. Nor did the rabbit for a moment. Then he had sped away, but the moment had been *a* moment. Unforgettable somehow.

Even with the widening further of her world, Rose could never have forgotten that. Not that the widening excluded the first little “sisters and brothers”; really it included them more than ever when the children came.

They came with a bounce and a shouting in the early days of that year. Rose, seated, wrapped up in a warm coat, against her tree, watching—and wondering whether they knew that she watched—the building preparations of a pair of robins not far off, was suddenly rendered aghast and horrified.

Calls and yellings; shouts and cat-calls. She rose hurriedly to her feet, and the robins retired almost as hastily.

This was their wood. Her father's, anyhow. These children, probably straight from the Elementary School, were trespassers, naughty little things. They would frighten the robins and all the rest of Rose's carefully-cultivated friendships if they were allowed to stay. Tall and rather stately-looking she marched through the trees, to the accompaniment of the spring-time and ring-time cooing of the wood pigeons overhead.

"You must not——" began Rose, as she faced the noisy gang.

Somehow, she never was quite sure why, the words died on her lips as she met the children. About six of them there were, red lipped and grubby. Some of them had torn up the leaves of the wood; they were looking for early primroses, of course, or possibly for birds' nests. But they met Rose's eyes with friendly grins.

"Miss, we's come to the wood."

"Hush," said Rose quite gently, instead of shooing them off as she had intended. "Hush, or you'll frighten the birds."

In a very few moments after that, somehow, she and the children were watching the robins; and the robins, after eyeing them with suspicion for a little, were going on with their nest building.

"Miss, is it sticks they're getting?"

"Hush. Just watch." Rose's voice was a whisper. The children began to whisper too in return. They had been boisterous enough before; now their tones were lowered in imitation of Rose's own. The robins, ceasing to suspect enemies, went on with their work. When at last nest-building operations seemed over for a time, the children burst out.

"Miss, they was robins. My brother took a robin's nest onc't."

"He couldn't possibly have done that, could he," said Rose, "if he'd known what a lot of trouble they take to make it?"

"No, miss. No, he couldn't."

"Miss——" the chorus began again.

“Hush,” said Rose. “This isn’t a noisy wood. We’re all quiet here. If you make a noise, you see, you’ll miss hearing the wood pigeons overhead.”

That had been the beginning of the children’s entrance into Rose’s world; but they had never left it. Almost every day they had come again, and Rose had never played with them. They had only come if they wanted to be “little sisters and brothers” with the wild things of the wood. The children had learned to come tiptoeing over the grass to the tree where Rose always was; they had learned, too, not even to want to pick the wild flowers of this particular wood, because, as Rose had told them, the flowers had been so “brave” to grow. Somehow or other Rose’s world had begun to be a tremendously happy one; she had got, so she reminded herself sometimes, what she had told her father she could never have, her “club.”



*It seemed natural, too, to tell the children the St. Francis stories.*

It seemed natural, too, to tell the children the St. Francis stories; and in the hot weather, when all the nests were made and the eggs hatched and the baby birds flown, it was lovely to sit under the tree that gave shade to them all, now that they needed it, and tell the stories to a gang of gaping children.

How St. Francis preached to the birds.

How St. Francis set the turtle doves free.

How he tamed the wolf of Agobio.

All these stories were told in the *Little Flowers* book; and they all fitted in with the beasts and the children and the world of the wood.

When she had finished telling, it didn't matter now if the children talked and chattered. There was no fear that they would disturb any of the birds and beasts; they were all "little sisters and brothers" together now, with Rose as leading spirit.

"Miss, I onc't see'd a hotter."

"What, Janie?"

"A hotter, miss. He lives near my Granny's, he does. I stayed with 'er, I did. I was feared of 'im then. But nex' time I goes to my Granny's I'll go and see 'im, I will, and tell 'im I'm not feared any more."

"Yes, Janie, I would."

It was in the very midst of this particular conversation that the bell rang from the home garden which always acted as summons to Rose if she was wanted at home.

"I must go now. You can find your way out without disturbing any bunny that may be asleep, or any bird that may be resting in the bushes, or \_\_\_\_\_"

"Yes, miss." This was part of the joy of the wood. Rose watched the children as they tiptoed off. Then, clearing the low wall that led to her father's grounds, she went towards the house.

"Rosie dear, the doctor." Her mother came to meet her at the door.

"Why, Mummy, I thought he wasn't coming again."

It was almost a year since Rose's possession of the *Little Flowers*. She had grown tall and rather thin, and she was quieter, though perfectly happy-looking. She wasn't allowed still to do much in the way of arduous undertakings. The boys, however, no longer found it necessary to tell her to "hook on" when they went out. They had dropped the half-affectionate and half-pitying term of "old lady." Rose's accident was, except that it had left her less strong, and always would, a thing of the past. So had been the doctor's visits for some months now.

"Whatever has he come for, Mummy?"

She knew, however, within half an hour.

“Well, Miss Rose”—the doctor’s professional visit was over by that time —“I came, you know, just to give the casting vote. Your father and mother both think you would like to go back to school, and I see no reason, really, why you should not.”

“To Roedale!” Rose suddenly gasped.

She hadn’t heard from Roedale girls for some time now. Stella kept up a little; but that was all. It would all be changed, or—was Rose changed? Well, anyway, she wouldn’t be able to do all the things she had done. Suddenly she wondered if she wanted to go back, as she was now. Not fit to “rag,” not fourteen any more; over fifteen, and so horribly easily tired.

“Not Roedale, darling. To another school. We thought of Seal. There’s a very nice school there. Not so big as Roedale, you know.”

“Seal?” Rose stood still. The little villagey place wasn’t more than twenty miles from home. She had seen the school, too, often as they had motored past. It had looked small; and Roedale had seemed, somehow, like a world full of girls. “Seal?” said Rose.

“Yes, Miss Rose.” The doctor put in his word. “It will be a quieter school this time. No games, you know, but surely you’ll find plenty to do without those. You can watch the others. And they’ll have all kinds of occupations, of course. I’ve known the school for years. Yes, you’re fit to go, I think, if—and it’s a big if—you remember that your back’s got to be taken care of.”

“Of course we’d mention that. I should go over,” Rose’s mother spoke anxiously.

“Of course.” The doctor’s visit was at an end.

“But, Mummy——” Rose stood still. Suddenly she realized that she didn’t at all want to go. “To go to school as a sort of half-and-half girl! I would rather stay at home. I’m perfectly happy. I’m not a dunce. I’m reading Daddy’s books now. I’ve got——” Rose suddenly stopped.

She’d got her world; that was what she was thinking, though she did not say so.

“But your father thinks it would give you wider interests, dear.”

“Does he?” Rose, with the *Little Flowers* under her arm, wondered how it possibly could.

### CHAPTER III

Rose was going to school. But the “half-and-half schoolgirl,” as she considered herself, was not going to be more half-and-half than she could help.

“Oh no, Dad, I’d really rather go up by train. Nearly every girl did at Roedale. *Not* by the car.”

So she was seated now in a third-class carriage of the express from London, which stopped at the junction not far from Rose’s home. Rose and her mother had come to the station in good time, and the car was waiting outside to take her mother back. The train drew up with a flourish, expected by the half-dozen of porters who awaited the daily event with some zeal. Almost at once, too, red-ribboned hats appeared at every window.

“Would you like to travel with some of the girls, Rose?”

“No, I don’t think so, if there *is* an empty one.”

Rose felt suddenly terribly shy.

She hadn’t felt shy at all when, at thirteen, she had travelled to Roedale. She had felt “just like the boys,” and had expected—as she had found—that friends would spring up around her like mushrooms on her arrival.

That had been true. It had happened. But, somehow, Rose didn’t expect the same thing to happen this time. Fifteen is not so sanguine, perhaps, as thirteen, and Rose felt handicapped, and lonelier than she had expected to feel.

For this time she had left so very much at home. Not only father and mother, but the wood, with its wild things that she knew and which knew her, and with the children, who had promised to be custodians of her wood while she was away.

Rose had told them all about it, and they had listened hard.

“I’m going away for quite a long time. Who will look after the wood?”

“We will, miss.”

They were so small, but Rose knew they would do it. She knew that, until she came back, they would love the wild things just the same. But they would miss her—possibly as much, in their own way, as she would miss



them. They wouldn't have a leader to show them the beautiful things that Rose had found and shown. And there would be nothing at school—how could there be?—to take the place of the children and the wild things of the wood that seemed such little sisters and brothers, in just the way St. Francis had taught Rose.

“An empty carriage, please, Mummy.”

There had been an empty carriage at the middle of the train, flanked by carriages full of girls, of course; there would be only a corridor between Rose and some of the girls. Some of them eyed her too as, walking rather slowly and looking very thin and tall, Rose made her way to it.

“Would you like an air-cushion, Rosie?”

“No, oh no, *please*,” said Rose, flushing. The girls must have heard her mother's words. And what would Roedale have said if they had heard of a new girl travelling with an air-cushion! Rose sat right back, and her mother stood outside.

“Mummy, you might see that gardener never shoos off those children from the wood. Dad said they could go there.”

“Of course I will. But they'll not be there so much after you're gone, Rose, you know. September means winter coming on.”

“I'm not so sure of that,” said Rose slowly.

Then suddenly she sat up. “Oh, Mummy, look!”

Her eyes had been fixed, half-seeing, on the entrance to the platform, where stood the ticket-collector attending to passengers who still straggled in. Suddenly, however, Rose more than half-saw. For a vision of little figures, bunched round his protesting form, rose before her eyes.

“What is it? Why, it's just some of the school children. What have they come for, I wonder?” Even her mother didn't know all the secrets of Rose's wood.

“But they're mine. Oh, Mummy, make him let them in. Arrange about the platform tickets, please, or the train will be gone. Oh, the darlings! I never expected they would guess, or think of coming.”

Rose was out of the train as her mother hurried down the platform.

“Certainly, Mrs. Graham. Why, of course——” As though by magic, in through the forbidden barrier came a red-cheeked, smiling, shy little group.

They ran helter-skelter before her. Even in their excitement, because Rose meant the wood to them, whispering in the voices they used in the wood.

“Miss, miss, teacher told us the train. We’s come to say good-bye.”

Rose’s arms suddenly seemed to hold all of them; or at any rate her heart did. She kissed ever so many hot pink cheeks, and had only time to scramble back again before the train began to move. “Good-bye, Mummy darling.— Good-bye, children. You won’t forget.”

“No, miss.” Then suddenly one of the small urchins scampered after the train, while the rest stood still, half-unhappy, half-excited, but the eyes of them all fixed on Rose.

“Janie Smith says, miss, as her Granny, what’s got the hotter——”

Rose didn’t hear the rest, for the train was going too quickly. She fixed her eyes on the children, and saw tiny Janie’s waving hand. Then the train swept into the tunnel.

“It was so sweet of them to come,” murmured Rose to herself.

She had forgotten any other people in the world at that moment except the world that home had meant; the world that had grown wider within the last months. It wasn’t long, however, before she realized the existence of others who would mean her world, too, before many hours had passed.

Voices were talking in the next carriage. It was full of Seal schoolgirls. They seemed chattering in just the way that Rose herself had chattered every first day of term travelling up, during the year and a bit that she had been a Roedale girl.

Games. She could hear them talking games-talk. Cricket term was over, of course. Hockey term had come; or would it be lacrosse at this school? Lots of schools were taking it up instead of hockey, Rose knew; even Roedale played lacrosse now. Well, Rose, by reason of her back, would be out of all that now.

“I say, is it the term for Morris dancing?” she heard somebody inquire in rather a high tone, bursting into a conversation that dealt with something entirely different.

“What, Dora? No, worse luck. Morris dancing is always summer term. It’s *ordinary* dancing this term, because of the Christmas holidays coming next, with parties and all that. Besides, Morris dancing can’t be awfully well danced out of doors in winter weather.”

Morris dancing. Rose listened rather eagerly to that particular topic. She heard names of dances which were new to her, and which suggested the wood again. For Rose had, with her father's help, looked up little dances that were suitable for the children to dance in the wood.

Gathering Peascods, Sellinger's Round, and others there had been danced round the trees, while Rose, who had trained the children, looked on.

These girls did that, did they? Well, even in that, Rose would have to be a looker-on too.

"Well, I'm jolly sorry. But I suppose we may practise them in hall if we want to?"

The talk went on to something else.

"What about Guides?" inquired some one.

A whole babel of voices rose in reply to that remark. Rose lost the whole of the answers because of the noise. Guides were new to her too.

New as an occupation, of course. Everybody, however shut off they may have been, knows something or other about Guides. Roedale hadn't introduced the movement. "We've no time, what with games and everything," had been Roedale's decision. Rose hadn't cared whether Guides were introduced or not at that time; she had been a small Middle with no voice in anything, but with an insatiable desire to rag and romp. Now she was different; but she still knew little, and so cared little, about Guides.

"They've got Guides, have they? That's new," thought Rose. "I wonder if there's anything in *that* that I could do."

She was clutching after straws. She didn't want to be out of things entirely, and though she was not particularly keen on Guiding, whatever it might mean, there seemed a chance, somewhere, that some one like herself could do Guide things, whatever they might be.

"I remember seeing pictures of them in uniform. Oh yes, and Princess Mary used to be—and is still, isn't she?—something connected with them," thought Rose. "They're Girl Scouts. Well, if they've got to do terrific feats, I certainly shan't be much use there either. Still, you never know; and even if not, the school will have a library, and there'll be country there. Mummy said so, and as I'm not to take the long walks, I'm to be allowed to prowl around."

She decided, as the train drew up, that it wasn't worth while, really, deciding for herself; since, probably, things would all be decided for her as soon as she arrived.

She did arrive, at the Seal station, anyway, just as she made up her mind. The express stopped, by special arrangement, at the small station on school returning days.

Out of the carriages, more quickly than Rose herself, trooped a bevy of girls. Everybody else, travelling farther north, looked at them with interest as they expeditiously trundled forth their suitcases and traps, hockey-sticks, violin-cases, a 'cello or two, any amount of magazines, and the schoolgirl requisites which accompany their owners to all schools on first day of term.

Rose didn't notice that, however; she was busy tugging at a heavy suitcase on the rack. Mummy had been just about to tell the porter to put it on the floor when the children had come into view. It had been forgotten then, and Rose wasn't particularly strong. However——

“I say,” said rather a panting voice, “don't do that. I'll have it down for you, if I may, in two ticks.”

## CHAPTER IV

“It really was terribly kind of you,” said Rose.

“Um,” returned the red-faced girl. She was evidently shy. Also as evidently, there were heaps of companions with whom she would surely rather have been conversing than with Rose, for her name was being called even as she valiantly tugged at Rose’s case and deposited it on the platform, just as the guard swung himself up and the train went off.

“BUN-ty!” called the girls.

“It never waits here long, you see,” returned the red-faced girl, taking no notice of the shouts.

“No, but——” Rose was remembering Roedale. Each man for himself had been the generally accepted slogan there. With the arrival of the train out had burst everybody, scrambling over everybody else’s goods and chattels; for to get first to the top of the hill where the great buildings of Roedale School stood had meant topping good luck for the term. Rose had made a dead-heat of it once with a long-legged Fourth, and had been applauded by her form and her dorm as the best sprinter yet. If there was any such custom here, her companion would lose all chance.

“And aren’t they calling you?” inquired Rose.

“No. At least, I mean they wouldn’t if they knew,” returned her companion cryptically, carrying Rose’s bag. “They’ve stopped yelling now, of course.”

So they had, though Rose could see no particular “of course” about it. She walked by her companion’s side, feeling dreadfully aware that the youngster, who must be about thirteen, was manfully attempting not to puff and blow. There was no porter in sight either to relieve Bunty of her burden; but a mistress standing at the end of the platform, in conversation with one or two girls, suddenly left them and hastened up towards the pair.

“You are Rose Graham? I am so sorry. The girls have just told me. I thought you were coming by car.”

“No.” Rose spoke shyly.

“Well, anyhow, Bunty found you. If I had known, I should have come down the train, of course, or told one of the older girls. The walk to school is

very short. Would you like to come up with the rest, or——”

The alternative was evidently a conveyance. Rose broke in.

“I can walk perfectly; only not very far.—And thank you very much indeed.” The last remark was addressed to the crimson Bunty, who had deposited the bag beside a heap of other baggage heaped up at the end of the platform, and was hieing off.

“That’s all right. If you’ve not got another partner, there’s Barbara and me.”

“Yes.”

Barbara, one of the calling multitude who had suddenly desisted at the sight of Bunty’s occupation, advanced from a throng of equally Middle School-looking girls, and spoke with a wide and cordial grin.

Rose somehow found herself automatically part of an easy-going multitude who set off for school, all talking together and exchanging holiday news; returning at intervals to consult or to ask questions of the mistress who brought up the rear with a couple of youngsters, and generally appearing quite as free, if not as frenzied, as Roedale girls had been at the beginning of term.

“Awfully hard lines on you to walk with Bunty and me,” remarked Barbara pleasantly. “But, you see, all the older ones are gone. They’re Rangers, and as soon as you’re a Ranger you can.”

“Rangers?” The word was a new one to Rose. But in this friendly company it didn’t seem likely, she thought, that Rangers would be strangers, anyhow, for very long. Mentally she wondered how Stella and she, when they had been aged thirteen and engaged for the first walk of term, would have enjoyed having a new girl foisted on them; “*and* one who can’t walk properly,” remembered Rose, as the rest of the school gained upon them in speed.

Bunty and Barbara didn’t appear to notice that, however; they continued, cheerfully, to talk to the new-comer.

“Rangers? Oh, you’ll know soon, if you don’t know yet. You’ll be one—sure to. If it’s not frightful cheek, may we ask how old you are?”

“I’m fifteen,” returned Rose.

That particular remark brought the first pause in the conversation. The pair looked at each other, and appeared to deliberate. Rather a bothered

expression of face characterized them. But they did not pursue the subject for a while.

Nor did Rose. She was watching the countryside, and wondering how soon the school itself would come into view.

When it did appear, it was long, low, and rambling; not so very much unlike their own house at home, but larger, and surrounded by extensive grounds dotted here and there with buildings suggestive of school adjuncts.

“That’s the san, I suppose?” suggested Rose, when one building appeared to be almost the exact model of the sanatorium at Roedale.

“Yes. And the gym’s the smaller building. It’s a jolly good gym. We dance there often; in the garden, too, in summer. That’s the Guide clubroom, that little building; it’s the reddest because it’s newest, but we’re training creepers up it. The Rangers’ den is that little offshoot-looking room that sticks out at the back.”

“Are Rangers Guides?” asked Rose.

“Yes, didn’t you know? We thought——” But the front couple who headed the procession suddenly stopped at the big gates and waited for the rest, and Rose found herself called back to the mistress at the end of the line, as the others went on.

“Rose, these are all Middle girls. You are not likely to be with them. You had better see matron first, I think, about your sleeping-quarters, and then have tea. Miss Blake will speak to you this evening, but not until you are rested, I am sure.”

Rose found herself conducted far from the friends that she had felt on the brink of making, to other scenes and pastures new, through a different door from the rest, up a flight of easy stairs, on the top step of which stood an elderly but capable matron, who scrutinized Rose as though she was debating whether she ought ever to have come to school at all.

“This is Rose Graham, matron. I brought her straight to you.”

“I’m obliged to you, Miss Scott. Yes, Rose Graham, I know all about *you*. You’re sleeping with two of the Middles, though, from your size, I take it that you’ll be considered an Upper. Still, you’re to go to bed at their time, so it will be simpler for you. And you’ll take your tea in my room, not with the rest to-day. No, I’m not asking if you’re tired. I’m telling you.”

Rose found herself ushered into a large airy room. Her cubicle there was the airiest too; it held, beside her bed and small furnishings, which were

much like those at Roedale, space enough for a huge bow-window, which took up almost the whole of the wall space. Left alone there, the new girl went straight to the view.

Wide expanses of woodland met her eyes, and woody, ferny scents rose as she peered out. She had not expected this view. On the way up, the road had led clear from the station with fields on either side. But away at the back of Seal House there must be woody country, almost forest land. Rose suddenly forgot the world of girls, and remembered the world she had left behind.

This was something like it; looking out from her window she would always, somehow, feel in touch with the wood at home. She needn't feel half so far away with this and the *Little Flowers*. Not that the girls she had met had made her feel at all an outsider; but Rose, somehow, by virtue of their interests, which must be so different from her own, still felt "half-and-half." And if she were to be considered as one of those Upper girls, whom as yet she hadn't seen, she would surely feel still more out of things, she thought. However, there was always this.

There was more. As she stood with her back to the door she heard a welcoming shout.

"I say, you *here!* Barbara and I were wondering, but we thought you couldn't possibly be put with *us!*"

There was such genuine satisfaction in the tones of Bunty as she entered, and in the grins of both Barbara and herself as Rose turned to face them, that the new girl forgot the view.

"It's very nice of you to be pleased. This is a lovely room," said Rose.

"You're perfectly sure you're fifteen?" returned they.

"Absolutely. Why?"

"Because, if you'll excuse us saying it, you're somehow mysterious. The Uppers all sleep on the floor above. They're sixteen, most of them; and they're Rangers because of that. But any one who is fifteen is an Upper at Seal. They're still Guides, of course, but they're working up to be Rangers. Well, if you're not a Guide, and if you are over fifteen, it sort of leaves you out."

Rose had felt decidedly left out on account of her handicap. But she said nothing.



“We simply made sure you were, at least, a jolly good Guide, if not a Ranger,” continued Barbara.

“Why?”

“Because—— Well, because we saw you with those children on the platform. That was why.” Barbara disappeared into her cubie, and began brushing her hair. “And that’s part of the mysteriousness.”

It certainly seemed mysterious to Rose, to whom Guides and Rangers were mysteries too, but she was as tired as matron had assured her that she was. She suddenly felt so, and sat down on the edge of her bed. She was glad that she was going to have tea far from the crowd below. She seemed entirely outside their world, and the idea of Guiding as being possibly an occupation in which she could share, was apparently gone. How on earth the fact of the children’s good-bye pilgrimage could have anything to do with Guides, Rose could not imagine, and she was too tired to care or to wonder why.

It was almost a relief when matron appeared.

“Now, Bunty and Barbara, you’re to behave quietly this term. You’ve Rose Graham sleeping here, and she’s not strong. Rose, I see you’ve brushed your hair. Well then, come along with me.”

Rose, feeling the eyes of Bunty and Barbara fixed upon her, as, so she thought, they imagined her to be more mysterious still, followed matron from the room.

## CHAPTER V

But with the tea came Jane.

“I’ll leave you two together, Jane,” said matron, retiring, “and don’t let Rose, here, take a poor tea; and I’ll take it as a poor tea if she doesn’t show a proper schoolgirl’s appetite.”

“I’ll see about that,” said Jane.

With Jane had arrived a decidedly fresh and breezy atmosphere; not too bracing and tiring, but jolly, and distinctly charming. She sat down by the little table, and smiled across at Rose.

“Sugar and milk?” said Jane.

Rose suddenly felt less tired and not so half-and-half. Jane’s first smile had somehow brought that about, and had brought with it a tinge of anticipation of nice things to come.

“Both, please,” said Rose.

There was silence, then, for a moment as Jane poured out the tea.

There couldn’t possibly have been silence, thought Rose, at that particular moment; not with any other girl, she knew. People generally burst into talk, and gradually grew interesting. Jane, by virtue of her silence—though she didn’t look in the least silent—was restful and interesting from the first moment. Something like the atmosphere of the wood, Rose was thinking, as she sipped her first cup of tea and nibbled at a sandwich which Jane passed to her without a word. It wasn’t until the cup was empty and the sandwich a thing of the past that Jane, replenishing Rose’s cup, began to talk.

“It’s so nice to have you,” said Jane. “We haven’t many Uppers, you know. And Miss Blake says that you will be with us. The school seems full of Middles this year. Several of the rest of us have left.”

Jane passed the cup.

“You’ve been to Roedale, I know,” said Jane. “It’s a splendid school. Much bigger than this, but you’ll find loads to do here. Are you a Guide?”

“No, I’m not. I’ve heard of them, of course; but I’ve never heard so much of them in one day as I’ve heard this afternoon. And yet, I don’t seem

to understand anything at all except”—Rose paused—“that it seems likely I’ve got to be left out of those too.”

“What!” Jane opened her eyes. She took no notice of the last word of Rose’s sentence, which had been uttered in rather a lower tone. She had made no reference, either, to games and dancing and the things Rose would perform to be “out of.” She stared incredulously through blue eyes, and wrinkled up a rather freckled brow. “Left out of Guides,” repeated Jane. “Why, however could you possibly be, unless you wanted to?”

“I didn’t want to. I thought, even though I’d heard nothing about them, that”—Rose paused—“they’d perhaps be something I could do. But it seems that my age——” Rose paused again, and her grey eyes looked into Jane’s blue ones. “I’m fifteen and a half; and I haven’t ever been a Guide. That, though I don’t understand why, seems, in the opinion of two tremendously nice Middles who share my room, to put me entirely outside.”

“But——” Suddenly Jane’s brow cleared. “I see,” said Jane. She deliberated for a moment before she went on. “Well, it’s funny, you know,” said Jane, “but your reputation as a Guide, or a Ranger, or even a Guider, has preceded you here. All the Middles who came up in the train with you have spread the news far and wide. Didn’t a whole troop of little things—a Brownie Pack or something like that—come and see you off just before your train started?”

“A Brownie Pack?” Suddenly the first real smile that had crossed Rose’s lips since she arrived at Seal swept from her lips to her eyes, and transfigured her grave features. “A Brownie Pack. What a sweet name for them! They’re just like that exactly. But as for Guides—why, they’re just the children from my wood.”

“The children from your wood?” repeated Jane.

“Yes, ours at home.” Rose’s tongue was loosed. She would not have spoken of the children, perhaps, to anybody but Jane, but Jane’s sweet-sounding name for the little denizens of her wood had taken Rose’s heart. She told a good deal—more than she knew she told, perhaps—and went on telling, because Jane’s eyes looked so sympathetically interested. She nodded, too, at certain moments of the story, as though she herself would have understood exactly the joys of the wood. When Rose drew to the close of her narrative, Jane said nothing. She only nodded again. “I’ve been ill, you see, for some time,” said Rose. “That was how it began.”

She hadn't meant to mention her illness; but it somehow didn't matter—not to Jane.

“Yes, I know. We all of us know that—we Uppers, you know, I mean. I wonder what put it into your head”—Jane's voice was thoughtful—“to start that Brownie Pack.”

“Oh, I do love that name! Thank you for inventing it. Oh, it just came—the idea. After reading something that Dad gave me, and getting used first, of course, to being fond of the other things in the wood. Then the children came; just by chance it was, and I nearly shooed them off. I am glad I didn't. Not that I possibly could have, I think, for they fitted in so exactly, and made the wood better still.”

Jane was silent for a moment. Then she spoke.

“I've got to explain, I think, that I didn't make up that charming name. 'Brownie Pack,' I mean.”

“Didn't you?” Rose looked quite disappointed. “It looks like you, somehow. Who did, then? I haven't mentioned the children or the wood to any one here.”

“I'll tell you.” Jane sat up. There was something arresting in her voice as her blue eyes sparkled.

“We call the tiny Guides—the Guides-in-the-making—a Brownie Pack, you know,” said Jane. “They're just the tinies, who will be Guides when they're a little bigger. There aren't any of them here. I don't think schools—boarding-schools, I mean—could have them. They're too tiny. But all the juniors are admitted to be Guides as soon as they come—when they've passed the tests, I mean—if they want to. And they all *do* want to.”

“That means,” Rose spoke quickly, “that you are all Guides here; though how my children could——”

But Jane was going on.

“Yes, we are. We've most of us worked up, either here or elsewhere. It's not very long ago since we Uppers became Rangers.”

“But what's the difference; and what do Guides do, and Rangers too?” Rose was really interested now. Somehow she was feeling linked to Seal School in the loveliest way since—though why, she could not imagine—her children of the wood had been described as baby Guides. Certainly they had guided her into happiness, thought Rose; and possibly she too had guided them there. Only——

“Guides, and Rangers too, do loads of glorious things,” said Jane. “The Middles are working for any amount of badges this year, and to win a badge means that you’re pretty proficient in the particular subject you’re working at. We wear uniform—of course you know that—and though Rangers needn’t, being older, most of us keep it on, and continue wearing our Guide badges that we worked for in the Middle School. Then we camp; and we do no end of other glorious things. I’m only giving a mixum-gatherum sort of idea about the things we do; they’re too many to enumerate now, and you’ll hear everybody talking Guides every day. Well, but the idea behind it is, of course, the aim behind the jolliness. We are making our world wider, you know, by learning to be of some kind of service to the world; and as there are Guides all over the world, we all feel linked up.”

Making a world wider. Suddenly Rose remembered herself in the hammock months and months ago. Her father had used something the same phrase; Jane’s words had reminded her of his own, when he had dropped the little book which Rose had brought carefully to school, dog’s-eared and fern-stained, almost scented with the woods, and certainly fragrant with memories of them. Yes, there was something in common between her own children and the tiny Guides. And Guiding must be rather glorious; and it didn’t seem, somehow, as though she ought to be outside, in the mysterious way at which the Middles had hinted in the dormitory before tea.

“Do you think I——?” began Rose.

But Jane had suddenly risen. She had looked at her wrist-watch, and had sprung to her feet.

“Rose, I’m very sorry. I simply must fly. Being head girl isn’t a sinecure, you know, and my duties begin in all directions within the next five minutes. But the time has flown, hasn’t it? I’ve been so tremendously interested. And I’m so glad you’ve come to Seal.”

Jane was gone, leaving something of her presence behind her: quiet, kind, and capable.

But she had gone without answering the question that Rose had been on the point of asking. “Matron said she would come for you. She is going to unpack for you, I think,” said Jane over her shoulder as she disappeared.

But Jane also had looked a trifle uncertain when Rose had previously stated her age and lack of Guide knowledge. Rose, following matron at that dignitary’s call, remembered that.

She also realized, without any hint of it from Jane, that it must have been something of a sacrifice for a head girl, on the first day of term, to give up teeing with her intimates just to look after a fresher. Rose remembered Roedale; she couldn't imagine the girls doing it there. She had been surprised, too, already by the way that the Middles, specially Bunty, had showed consideration and kindness just as a matter of course. Was it anything to do with Guides? Rose suddenly recalled Jane's words, as she had spoken with her eyes glowing, as she gave what she had called a "mixum-gatherum" idea of what Guides did. "Some kind of service to the world," Jane had said.

Possibly that aim of theirs lay behind the small kindnesses and the general air of friendliness that seemed to characterize everybody whom, so far, Rose had met with at Seal School.

"If so," thought Rose, "it does seem rather worth while, this Guiding idea of theirs."

## CHAPTER VI

“If you’d care to,” said Jane.

Rose’s heart gave a leap. She had been seated writing rather a long letter home. There was nothing so very much to say in it, but since it appeared that one of the classrooms, and all the time before supper, was to be her exclusive own, the letter had widened out, to fill up time.

For Rose—on returning downstairs, when matron’s unpacking was finished—had found all the Middles *en route* for some destination whither she herself apparently had no place. Miss Burton, the house-mistress, had called to her to stay behind.

“Rose, these girls will not be your division in school, you know. They are going now to a Guide club meeting. Your own set, the Uppers, are busy too. I think, as the rest have written home, that you may as well do so now. Post your letter in the box by the front door.”

Miss Burton had disappeared, and Rose had set to work.

It was nice, of course, to have a chance to tell Mummy and Dad about her safe arrival. They would be longing to hear. It was quiet and peaceful, too, in the big empty classroom, which, looking towards the back of Seal House, held the same far-off forest view as Rose’s own cubicle. At intervals in the writing Rose listened to shouts which blew across the garden and in through the window on the mid-September breeze from the little house which Bunty and Barbara had designated as the Guide clubhouse. There were elections, or speeches, or something interesting going on there. Rose had watched the girls filing across, and had seen that not only the Middles but the Uppers too had entered the little building. She was feeling particularly out of things when, as she folded her letter, she heard the door open behind her, and Jane’s voice spoke.

“Rose, would you care to come along to the Rangers’ meeting?”

“The Rangers?” Rose sprang up.

“Yes. That’s the rest of us. The Guide meeting’s over. We’ve all been at it, but you had your letter to write; and we thought it would be muddling, perhaps, to say nothing of being fearfully tiring, to listen to the transports of the Middles over their first Guide meeting of term. But we Rangers are more grown-up, and we shan’t tire you, I’m sure. Our own meeting comes next.”

“I’d love to, if I may. Where is it?”

“In the Rangers’ den,” Jane laughed. “We’re fearfully proud of it. We built it ourselves. No, not brick by brick, though we’ve papered it and decorated it, you’ll see. It’s called Tibet by some of the Middles— forbidden country, you know. Only the Rangers have any possession of it.”

“But I——” began Rose.

“Come along.” Jane was leading the way.

Most of the Guides were already dispersing as they reached the clubroom, through which they had to pass to reach the smaller annexe room beyond. The Guide room itself was fearfully interesting too; and Rose, passing through, got a glimpse of objects and adornments as interesting as they were strange.

There were little tables lining the walls which probably had been pushed back to provide standing space for the school; the walls were adorned with large sheets of cartridge paper—one for each of the four. “Daffodils” was the word heading the first sheet that caught Rose’s eye. Underneath came a line of names, and a list of tiny pictures beside each name. “Badges,” read Rose as she passed. The other sheets were headed “Hollyhocks,” “Heather,” and “Winter Roses” respectively, and a list of names appeared under each heading.

At the end of the room was a huge cupboard, at which two of the Middles were endeavouring to arrange neatly a huge coil of rope which had, apparently, lately been in use. Miss Scott was standing beside them looking on. A Union Jack was draped over the fireplace, which looked, thought Rose, more like a kitchen fireplace than that of a schoolroom, since it appeared to be flanked with a small oven, and to be hung round with pots and pans. In one corner of the room a huge doll, swathed with rather amateurish-looking bandages, suggested that its accidents had been many, and its nurses too. A shelf of books stood in a small alcove, and several of the Middles were standing reading the titles, while Barbara, pencil and notebook in hand, seemed to be considering their requests for certain volumes of their choice. On one wall, beside the Daffodil chart, there hung also a huge map. “GUIDE MAP OF SEAL” was written beneath it in capitals, and it was dotted with trees and houses; pictured apparently by would-be drawers to scale. In one corner, stacked together, were a number of signalling flags.



“This way. The rest are waiting for us,” said Jane, leading the way through the little door.

They entered, followed by the eye of every Middle girl, the glance of each expressing eager interest.

Nobody could have felt more eagerly interested, however, than did Rose herself.

The Rangers’ den seemed very different at first sight to the new girl as she passed in. It was snug, though business-like too. There was a writing-table in one corner; four or five chairs were dotted here and there; one or two pictures hung on its walls, flanked by certain charts and plans which suggested the charts and plans next door. The floor was stained and polished; a cabinet, full of specimens evidently collected by the Rangers, graced one end; a camera or two had been deposited in different corners; a rather empty set of bookshelves faced her as she went in.

The occupants she hardly noticed until Jane spoke.

“I’ve brought Rose. Miss Blake thinks as we do, and Miss Scott agreed.”

There were three other girls in the room now besides themselves; all of them were very evidently Uppers, and they bore themselves with less juvenile an air than did the Middles next door. They untied themselves from the group which they were forming beside the fireplace, and each turned to smile at the incoming Rose.

“That’s all right, then. She’d like to join?”

“I haven’t told her yet. Rose, sit down. We don’t stand on ceremony here. And we *have* got chairs. This one will suit you probably.”

Rose, knowing herself to be certainly less than the least in such a group, obediently took the hammock chair which was pointed out to her as her seat.

It was jolly of them, she thought, to have remembered her back.

They had remembered more than that, however. Jane, anyway, seemed to possess remembrance of every word that Rose had uttered during the little tea-meal that they had shared. Rose, sitting back, listening rather than contributing to the conversation, wondered as it went on.

“Miss Blake said, when I told her, Rose——” Jane was addressing the new girl, “when I told her what you’d done, that she thought, if you cared to join Rangers, it would be absolutely fair. There’ll be a test to pass first, of

course, but we'll all help you. I've talked to the rest, and we all agree, don't we?"

"Rather." The other four looked as pleased as was the sound in Jane's voice.

"But I don't understand exactly, although—whatever it is—I feel sure I should love to join." Rose found her voice. "But—as to what I've done. I've done nothing. I have heard of Guides, but until this afternoon I've never even *realized* them."

"You've got to it another way." One of the others spoke. Her voice was quiet; rather like Jane's, only softer. "Jane has told us, you see."

"The other way?" This too was Greek to Rose.

"It's like this, Rose," with Jane leading, the rest took up the explanation. "There's generally a lot of preparation before one's allowed to become a Ranger. Until one is sixteen, you know, one learns only as a Guide. We've all been Guides ever since we came. Well, you've come, almost at Ranger age, and you say you've never been a Guide at all."

"Yes," Rose nodded.

"But, you see, you *have* been. That's Jane's point," Sylvia, who had spoken before, went on. "You've not worked up for tests, and you've not gained badges, of course; but from what Jane's told us about your work at home——"

"The children in the wood. The things you taught them—after you'd taught yourself." It was Jane's voice.

"But——" Rose felt perfectly bewildered, though, somehow, there was coming a dim understanding of what their meaning might be.

"Tell her about the other kind of Rangers; the ones that needn't have been Guides," put in another voice.

"Yes. You see, Rose, all Rangers needn't have been through the Guide training, so long as they really want to join and understand what they're joining for, at sixteen years old. You see, some of them don't know of Guides till they're too old, really, to work with the younger girls."

Everybody seemed trying to help. Jane, however, held to her point.

"But I want her to join as though she's been one. She *has* been, all the time. A lone Guide, perhaps; but not even that. She's found out Guiding for

herself. And the Head says that though she's under sixteen, she may." There was a pause.

"Service, you mean?" said Rose in a small voice. "That's what you said it was. Well, I don't think——"

"You've got it, anyway, the Guide idea, and—that's topping!" There was no more talk about the matter. Rose, still feeling bewildered but fearfully pleased, since everybody else seemed entirely at one on the matter, smiled with enthusiasm.

"Oh, I'd adore to, if I may. But what's the test? Perhaps I can't do it."

"Do it? We'll help you, of course. You can prowl round the Guide room too, and the others will show you. You can't help understanding."

That seemed everybody's opinion. And the Rangers being a contingent who "ran themselves," their opinion was apparently final. Rose suddenly forgot that she had ever considered herself a half-and-half schoolgirl at all.

## CHAPTER VII

But the feeling came back and back somehow. There were so very many other things that Rose could not do. And there were so many things—and just the ones that she used to do—that Rose was cut out of altogether, of course.

For not only Guides, but games and gardening, hikes over the surrounding country, dancing and drill, all were cut out of Rose's school life. If it hadn't been for her Ranger test, she would have been far more lonely than she was.

But everybody helped her; even the juniors. This was the first time that a Ranger had been admitted to the den without previously having worked up through the school. Nobody knew the reason why, except the Head, Miss Scott, the Guide-mistress, and the Rangers themselves; but they all felt flattered beyond measure when Rose tentatively visited their meetings, by Miss Scott's permission, asked questions, and appeared to enjoy every minute of her time.

Barbara and Bunty too, up in the dorm, were only too willing to be led into Guide talk.

"Why did we join? Oh, because everybody was one, I suppose," remarked Barbara, combing out her bobbed but still refractory locks. "But perhaps we wouldn't have if everybody hadn't seemed so jolly. One doesn't join *everything* because everybody else belongs to it."

No, that was certainly true. The Seal girls were fully as independent as the girls had been at Roedale; they were much the same, only with a certain difference: their world included other people as well as themselves.

"When somebody's new, you see," Bunty took up the explanation, "and feeling a bit fresherish, and everybody else who's not new seems jollyish, and wanting to drag you into something jolly, well——"

Those had been Rose's feelings too exactly, only, being older—and being older too by reason of her illness than her age—she might not have expressed them exactly the same.

"Well then, and when we started Guides it was so topping that, why stop?" inquired Bunty, looking round after a gargling process which followed nightly washing of teeth.

Why, indeed?

That had been during Rose's first week at Seal. She was a girl of almost a quarter-term's standing now; and she felt as keen, or possibly keener, now on Guide work than she had at first. The keenness grew.

In Rose's case it grew particularly strong because, in working for her test, her work seemed a safety-valve for all her longings for the other part of school life from which she was debarred. To stand, on the long afternoons, watching others play the hockey games for which her soul, even if her body could not manage the exertion, still longed; to sit out dances instead of stepping them—all this might have been much harder than it was if Rose hadn't found the working up for her position as a regularly recognized Ranger so absorbing and glorious.

"It should take about a month," had agreed the Ranger patrol, "and we'll all help. Then you'll take the promise, and you'll be fully fledged. Until then, of course, you're just a Tenderfoot still, in the eyes of the authorities."

The test seemed, marvellously enough, to fit in with what Rose could manage to do. Though Jane, as Ranger leader, was not, she said, so sure of the "marvel" part of it. "It's probable that you're not the first would-be Ranger who's a bit handicapped," had remarked Jane. "There are alternatives all down the line, as you'll see. It's meant to include all kinds of girls."

It certainly seemed to be. For although Rose couldn't possibly have "visited six places of interest in the neighbourhood" just then, the alternative of "knowing six trees by their leaves, fruit, and twigs, and to be able to recognize them at fifty yards' distance," was quite possible for her.

She chose that part of the intelligence test at once. Rose chose everything that somehow linked her up with the wood where, unguessingly, she had been Guiding gradually all the time. She had grown to know all the trees there, and she had taught her "Brownie Pack," as she called them even to herself now, the things that she knew. Now, during part of games time, or during long-walks time, when she herself was tethered to within a rambling walk from school, Rose's study of the trees went on.

There were handicrafts to be done too. That, so far, hadn't come her way much. Rose had always been an execrable mender and maker, and she herself remembered feeling horribly ashamed of the appearance of a certain rent which she had painstakingly mended for one of the children in the wood. But now, as would-be Guide, she found it essential that she should

know how to use her hands, and during the hours when she was forced to lie down or sit-out there was plenty of time for that.

Plenty of choice too in the suggestions put forward. She might tie seven knots; make a garment or some useful article for the den; or be able to hem, darn, and patch; or to clean or remove stains; or to splice ropes and make a Turk's-head knot.

"You'd better set to and make us a waste-paper basket for the den," suggested Ranger Sylvia; "that will kill two birds with one stone: you can show it up for your test, and we need one badly."

"Come into Guide club this afternoon, Rose," begged Bunty and Barbara. "We're learning to make Turks' heads, and that would do for your test."

But nothing must just "do," decided Rose. Within herself, as she shook her head at Sylvia's and Bunty's suggestions, she had decided that she would, in time, whether insisted upon or not by the authorities, learn all of these things. But meantime—somehow with the children some twenty miles away still looking after her wood and remembering her—Rose set steadily upon the alternative work which would have seemed least interesting, possibly, to the rest, though in some ways it held a gleam about it to Rose that no other hand-work could have held.

She learned to make a child's overall—green, the colour of the wood. She learned to darn and patch and hem, so that, should another opportunity occur, she needn't be ashamed of her work. All this was going on gradually, and the working up to her Rangership in itself was a joy to Rose.

There were the health test and the service test too to be considered; these also presented alternatives which at first seemed likely to daunt even Rose's indomitable spirit, until she asked advice of the Rangers themselves.

"I say"—Rose's handicap, if it really was one so far as Guiding went, was taken for granted now in the den, anyway, where everybody was comradey and outspoken and keen—"I say, how about the health? How on earth can I prepare a sickroom and make a bed with a patient in it? I should be in it myself with the patient before the thing was done! It's not that I don't know how—from watching!" Rose gave a half-wry, half-gay smile; "but——"

"What's the alternatives?" The rest trooped round.

Jane was leader for the first six months of the Ranger patrol. It hadn't been in existence for more than three, so she had a term still in which to act.

The rest, Sylvia and Lyn, Doris and Mary, would, in turn, be Ranger leaders also, possibly Rose herself, all in due course. They studied together the list of alternatives.

“They might let you write about it, instead of doing it,” suggested Lyn.

“No, thanks. I want to *do*,” returned Rose.

“Well, you can’t perform physical exercises and know their value,” objected Sylvia.

“I *can*, in a way; but they’d be such futilely easy ones—the ones I could do. I want to do it properly,” Rose sighed.

The third alternative was to “go for and describe a five-mile walk; or to know three country dances.”

The Rangers deliberated.

“Rose, any one but you would ask leave to write about walks you’ve *had*; or—something.”

“But ‘somethings’ won’t *do*. I want to be a proper Ranger. The only thing——”

Rose paused.

“The dances. What about them?” she inquired as the others stood mute, remembering Rose’s possibilities of sitting-out only on dancing nights. “You see, the rules say you must ‘know them.’ I read up in Dad’s books, for I so badly wanted some real forest dances for the children round the trees. And most of the Morris dances that everybody’s heard of—the ones you have here, and the ones we had at Roedale—are just danced in lines. Well, I found myself,” Rose’s eyes glistened as she remembered the joy of the discovery, “that there are two ring dances, which the children used to dance round the oldest tree we knew. One was called Sellinger’s Round, and I taught them that. The other was called Gathering Peascods. Of course I couldn’t dance them; but the test wants you to *know* them. Do you think I’d be allowed—if the youngest girls here would let me—to teach them that, and show that I ‘know’ it that way?”

Miss Scott, on being asked by the Ranger leader, who, in spite of the fact that the Rangers were supposed to decide for themselves, was often approached for her opinion, based on the experience of years, nodded emphatically.

“Why, that’s a splendid plan. Got the rest all fixed up now, Rose?”

“Practically. The service test is topping. I’m going to borrow the Guide doll and literally bandage it to bits; that will be joy. And as for the alternative of knowing rules about faints and burns and scalds, I’m going to do that too. It seems so frightful not to know them.”

“Rose, you’ll make a pattern Ranger,” laughed Miss Scott, going off. “I’ll tell the little ones about your dance idea, and let them decide who shall learn.”

Everybody decided to learn, however, from Jane downwards, and Rose, up on the platform, from her chair directed her pupils with as much enthusiasm as they took up the two country dances that she “knew.” There were several practices, but on the evening when the Head turned up apparently unsuspectingly, and found the hall gay with dancing rings of girls while Rose looked on, no longer teaching but admiring her pupils, the health test was considered, not only by the Head and everybody else, but by the Tenderfoot herself, as really accomplished.

“That was the hardest, but it’s done. And I’ll be a real Ranger, and not a half-and-half,” decided Rose, as she turned over in bed that night and fell asleep.



## CHAPTER VIII

Rose was a real Ranger; no half-and-half about Rose at all. Her enrolment, the test passed and approved, took place a week or two before half-term.

The den was decorated and adorned by the rest in honour of the event. Sylvia, the artist among the Uppers, had adorned the walls with woodcraft signs and symbols; Lyn, the caterer, who held office as social functioner, had arranged a festive spread where the health of the new Ranger would be drunk at a private At Home in the den. Each one of the four already installed had their own particular offices, from Jane, leader and keeper of the colours, to Mary, the nimble-fingered, whose stencilled curtains adorned the windows, and whose handmade hearthrug lay before the fireplace. There was no Ranger, full-fledged, who did not “specialize,” as they termed it, in her own particular love.

They had all, of course, been present at Rose’s enrolment. It had taken place in the big hall. The whole school had been there, and besides the school—so thought Rose, somehow, though she mentioned the fact to nobody else—the children had been there, in memory only, perhaps, but there, all the same, because they had taught her, in the little wood at home, the first real meaning of what Guiding was. In Rose’s pocket, too, there had lain, invisible again to the rest, but put there of set purpose by Rose, a certain little book that Dad had once dropped into her hammock more than a year ago. As Rose went through the formality of enrolment, her world seemed wider than she had ever realized it before. Home and school and the wood all seemed to have gone to her making as a Ranger Guide.

“What is your special promise as a Ranger?”

Miss Blake had asked the question in the room that was still and quiet, although the whole company of Rangers and Guides were there.

“I promise,” Rose’s voice had been clear and happy, “to do my best. To do my duty to God and the King. To help other people at all times. And to keep the law of the Guides.”

“And what is your special responsibility as a Ranger?”

“My special responsibility is to render service by taking this promise out into a wider world.” Rose felt the world grow wider, almost, as she said the

words.

“I trust you to remember these responsibilities, and I welcome you as a Ranger.” The Head’s voice had been low and clear.

That was all.

So much had gone to the making of the Ranger; more, perhaps, than to the making of any other Ranger in the school. The Guides trooped out; Rose herself, a full-fledged Ranger, trooped out too with her own set. The whole matter had taken but a few moments, but it had not felt less important to Rose for that.

And now, the test passed, what was she to do next?

That point, over a tea of magnitude, to which the Guides, in preparation for their cookery badge, had contributed a Ranger cake, was deliberated by the five girls.

“Rose, you’ll have to take your special position now.”

“What?” Rose’s eyes flashed.

“Well, we’ve all got something special. You must too. We’ve all been waiting. We thought you’d do it so decently. Caterer is booked; so is colour keeper: not that there’s much catering to do this term for Lyn—except this spiffing tea!—her chores come along when she has to arrange for camp fodder in the summer. But, about you——”

“What else is there?” inquired Rose.

“It varies with the companies, I suppose. But, anyhow, we want a log-book writer and a librarian. Could you do it? It’s pretty hefty work.”

“Log-book writer, at least,” put in Jane. “As for being librarian, Rose won’t have to write all the books. That will be nothing more than a sinecure office at first.”

Rose looked round at the empty shelves.

“Having just begun, you see,” she was informed, “we didn’t want to take any of the Guides’ library books. I daresay we’d have been allowed some for a nucleus; but we’ve had the reading of them already, and there’ll be other Guides coming along all the time who’ll want to read them too. Rangers’ books ought to be different. We want ideas. Books cost money, of course; but we could pay a weekly sub, if you liked; and any special ones could possibly be got by individuals. There *are* such things as birthday presents!”

Jane paused.

Tea was over, and though the enrolment day was a red-letter day to Rose particularly, and to all of the rest too in some way or other, yet classes, prep, prefects' duties, and everything else went on the same. In ten minutes the Uppers would be due to take up various duties which Rose, Upper though she might be, was not able to perform. On this particular day, too, she had been advised by matron that a rest, instead of the usual prep, must be her portion after the excitement of the enrolment during the afternoon.

"You missed your lie down, Rose, and we're not going to get you ill again. Ranging even is not worth that."

Privately, Rose thought it was. But she had agreed to matron's proposition that she should rest after tea. She watched the rest of the Rangers disappearing until only Lyn and herself were left behind.

"As caterer I'm going to wash up," remarked Lyn. "No, you stay there. You might as well be prepping as drying—so far as resting goes, I mean. Besides, as Jane said, I'm glad of something at this time of year to use up my catering energies on. It's different in summer. Camp fodder isn't always easy to arrange."

"Where do you camp?" Rose looked out on to the forest view, which was not so clear from this ground-floor room as it was from her bedroom, where she could see the tops of the trees. Still, beyond them, in the darkness there lay the forest country, where Rose, so far, had never gone.

"Well, it's all woody country here," Lyn was replying as she rattled the teacups; "but there's one small foresty bit about four miles from here which is specially ripping. We call it ours. In fact, when Jane and I and two of the Uppers who left last term were working up for our pioneer badges we made the most glorious pioneer hut there. It's standing there still, I suppose, all on its lonesome; but it's weather-tight, and I mean to slip off and see how it's bearing up without us this term. It's in a lovely sheltered spot, close to the stream. We built it there on purpose, in case we used the hut for camps. There are trees all round. Nobody could guess it."

"How glorious!" Rose was listening, and seeing the small wood of Lyn's story as exactly like her little wood at home. St. Francis had had a little hut in a wood, she remembered; she was wondering whether, in the holidays, the boys might not build her one under the oldest tree where the children danced, when Lyn spoke again.

“It is glorious. Wish you could get there; but it’s four miles off. We get water for tea-drinking from a little cottage not far from the stream. An old woman lives there; it’s all a kind of fairy-tale spot.”

It sounded so. Only more beautiful still, perhaps, thought Rose. When Lyn, after stacking up the china in a little cupboard and removing all traces of the late feast, disappeared, Rose went to the window and peered out.

There was only darkness; but the forest was there, beyond—just as surely as the wood was still waiting near her home, and the children still guarding it for her.

“I wonder if being a Ranger will make any difference,” thought Rose. Suddenly the thought that the enrolment was over, and its preparation behind her, made her feel a trifle anxious about what there might be left to do. All the times when the others had been busy and occupied had, so far, been filled with occupation for Rose too. She had prepared her tests so thoroughly and whole-heartedly that no time had ever been idle on her hands.

“Well, anyway, there’ll be the log-book to keep and the library.”

Rose turned as she stood alone and gazed at the empty shelves. There wasn’t much to do to that, at any rate. She remembered Jane’s words:

“We could have had something from the Guides’ library for a nucleus if we’d asked. But we’d read them, and there’d be others coming along who’ll want to read them too. Besides, our library ought to be something different.”

Rose stood there thoughtfully.

Of course there could be a subscription, as the others had suggested, and there must be many books that they would love to have. But——

Suddenly Rose put her hand into her pocket, where, all through the enrolment, she had felt the presence of the *Little Flowers*. She took it out and looked at its dog’s-eared, fern-scented pages. Dad had given it to her; and the book itself had given her the wood; and the wood had given her the children; and the children had linked her on to the Guides and Rangers. And to-day was her enrolment day.

Rose, after standing still for a moment, reached up and placed her book on the Ranger shelves. The very first library book to be there. She gazed at it for a moment. Then she reached up and lifted it down, fetched a pencil, and opened its fly-leaf.

“To all the Rangers,” wrote Rose.

## CHAPTER IX

It was glorious to wake up next morning and to feel that she was a Ranger at last. Glorious, too, to know that she had a right to the den now, and was no more a Tenderfoot, admitted under special circumstances.

It was glorious, too, to have her own niche, and her own duties. The post of log-book writer and librarian suited Rose exactly.

But the duties did not seem, for all that, sufficiently arduous for Rose. Books—the right books—must come gradually. Log-book records cannot be anything but short entries, as a rule. Rose was left with more time on her hands than she had had ever since her arrival at Seal School.

Not that she felt half-and-half any longer. That state of mind was gone and forgotten weeks ago, but as the term wagged on, with its many other varied occupations for everybody else, Rose realized how much of herself she had put into the preparation for her test, and how much of herself was willing and anxious now to continue. The other Rangers, and the younger Guides too, had matches ahead, in preparation for which they strove manfully on the hockey field.

“They also serve who stand and shout, I suppose,” thought Rose dubiously; “but that doesn’t amount to so very much. I’ve not got to the end of Rangering. I’m only at the very beginning. I’ll ask Miss Scott.”

Miss Scott listened and nodded.

“Yes, of course, Rose, I quite agree with you. Why not, for instance, work up for some of the Guide badges that you’ve not already got? Any Ranger can do that, you know, if, like yourself, they haven’t been Guides before. Certainly you can’t do log-book writing and librarian work all day—even if there was enough of it to do—and Miss Holt is anxious for you not to stand about too much in the cold watching the matches. Go into the Guide room and study the list of badges that can be earned. Try and find an out-of-door one, suitable to this time of year too. Suitable, also, for the time and strength you’ve got at your disposal. There may be some other Guides working for the same thing, and it would help you all to work together.”

Miss Scott nodded, and was off.

Rose had never been very much inside the precincts of the Guide room proper. She had used it, of course, as the only entrance to the Rangers’ den,

but beyond an interested glance as she passed through, she had never realized that this particular part of the school was as much at her disposal as it was at the disposal of the younger Guides. Entering almost as soon as Miss Scott had disappeared, she found a round half-dozen seated there.

“May I come in? Miss Scott said——” began she apologetically.

“Come in, of course!” Everybody rose *en masse* to meet her. Everybody knew Rose, of course, and Rose knew everybody, but she had not come very much into contact with the younger girls, except Barbara and Bunty of her dorm. “We’re planting bulbs,” explained they.

“Bulbs!” Rose came along to see.

“Yes, rather. And we’re pretty late about it. Haven’t you ever heard that Lord Mayor’s Day is the latest day for planting bulbs? Well, we’re practically in November now, so we’ve no time to lose. We always have bulbs in the windows; and we generally get a pot of Roman hyacinths ready in time to send to the Seal Hospital as a Christmas present just before we go home. We’ve planted those, but these come later.” The seated ones pointed to an assortment of bulbs of different sizes. “Naturalist badgers do it,” remarked they. “We’ve got a good many daffodils and snowdrops left, and we were just wondering where to put them in. Our pots are filled. A badge, Rose? What fun! We’ll help you. Try the naturalist one; it’s fine, only, perhaps, it’s best to work for in the summer.”

Rose nodded. Her eyes had left the bulbs and was fixed on the long list surmounting the Guide-room wall. “It’s got to be an outdoor one, because of fresh air,” remarked she thoughtfully; “there don’t seem many.”

“There’s the pioneer,” she was informed in chorus. “Lyn and Sylvia and Jane worked up for that, and built the toppingest hut on the edge of the forest. We’ll pass it driving to the Moreton Match in a week or two, and we all mean to stand up in the bus and see if it’s still weather-tight. Now that there are no leaves on the trees we might find out, though the Rangers say that it’s hidden.”

“Yes, they told me.” Rose’s eye was travelling down the page. “I’d love a woody place to work for a badge in, but the forest is too far, you see.”

The others nodded.

“There’s the pathfinder,” said Rose suddenly. “What must I do for that?”

“Well, woods would be topping for that, if you could get there. There’s a lot of tracking, you see, to be done in the pathfinder. And you have to know

all the lanes and short cuts, and so on. Rhoda took it last term, and she found the cutest short cut to church. It led us through fields instead of along the highroad, and it's glorious to use in summer-time."

"Talking about woods, if you really want one, there's the Scrubs," put in one of the rest.

"The Scrubs!" Rose turned. The very idea of calling any wood by such a name made her eyes flash. "What a horribly ugly name!"

"Well, it's called that because it is horribly ugly. Truly, we didn't make up the name; it was christened before school came, so don't blame us. It would be different if it belonged to school; but that's just the snag: it doesn't."

"But I don't understand," Rose said.

"Well, it's this way. That piece of land is common land; it's beyond the field and away on the other side. You'll not have noticed it, because you don't play games; but in summer our balls are always going over, and we sometimes hit boundaries there. It doesn't look like a wood exactly; it looks like its name. But it must have been a wood, part of the forest, perhaps, ages ago. Only all the country's been cleared except that bit, and the rest of the forest is four miles farther off. Trippers and any one who likes—tramps and so on—have made it a happy hunting-ground for ginger-beer bottles and papers."

"They've *made* it into the Scrubs," put in one of the others. "School's only been at Seal House for ten years, and the tenant before school put up a trespassing board there. It's there still, only the trippers have thrown stones and mud at it, and the weather's washed out the words. So it's no use."

"But if it's common land," said Rose, "there oughtn't to be a board."

"That's what Miss Blake said when we asked if we could paint it up. We wanted it fearfully for a bit of Guide practice ground. But she said that every one else had the same right to it as we had. And Miss Scott, at next Guide meeting, arranged for us all to go and clear up the papers, for the good of the community."

The tones of the speakers were not particularly delighted sounding. "The mess those trippers had made!" ejaculated somebody. "A jolly pity they're not Guides; that's what we thought. No Guide would have left it in such a state."

Rose, however, had not noticed their tone.

“I’d love to see it. How do I get there?”

“As easy as two hoots. Walk right round the field. It’s at the other end. There used to be a gate through into school, but it has been bricked up now, though you can get in through the hole, if you like.”

Rose was off.

Somehow this felt adventurous—adventurous and tremendously interesting. She had had no idea that even the smallest wood—even a wood that had apparently degenerated into Scrubs—lay anywhere near. Her lead was so short; her walks must be so limited that any distant world was shut out—for the present at least. But she must see this; she must see it without delay, and possibly she might find something there which would remind her of her own wood at home.

A hockey practice was in progress; Rose passed the players without even noticing them. She reached the wall that marked the boundary of the big field, and looked for the hole.

Yes, there it was. The wall was high, and until Rose scrambled through she had no idea what would greet her.

The first sound was the creaking of the trespasser’s notice as it swung in the late autumn breeze, large, and evidently wrought strongly, so that all who came might read. It had evidently been there for many years; a robin was perched on its swinging board. The words were half-obliterated, owing to the fact—as the younger Guides had truly told her—that stones and mud had evidently been thrown at it by the people whom it had failed to intimidate by its warning words.

“It was theirs, really, all the time,” said Rose, looking round.

Oh, it might be called the Scrubs, but the trees were there. There was the same silence, too, in this wood as there was in the quiet wood at home. The leaves were gone from the trees and lay thickly over the ground; probably they covered tripper tracks and traces, but did the wood mind that? There were initials printed here and there on the barks of some of the oldest ones. There was a hollow in one ancient-looking oak tree where Rose sat down to rest.

Probably very many people—call them tramps and trippers if one liked—had found this little wood a resting-place instead of trudging on the extra miles to the forest. Certainly one of them had, for Rose, burrowing a nest for herself under the sighing boughs, unearthed by mistake from among the leaves a piece of “litter” that the Guides had failed to remove.



“Deer Dad,—It’s heaven in the woods where we’s sitting——”

Rose folded it up, and buried the little note in the damp soil. Somebody had written that, and had not finished it. But possibly the writer still remembered this wood.

“Even if they spoil the look of it, they love it,” thought Rose. “Oh, they do. This shows it.” For a robin—probably the very one who had stood balancing himself on the swinging board—suddenly alighted at her feet.

Shy? Not at all. Rose remembered the trouble she had had to tame her birds at first. But this bird had been trained. The people had fed him, and probably admired him too. This wood should change its name. “It shan’t be the Scrubs any longer; it shall be the People’s Wood,” decided Rose. “They love it, or they wouldn’t come to it. And anything they’ve done that isn’t exactly Guidish is because they don’t understand.”

## CHAPTER X

“Find it?” inquired the Guides amiably as Rose returned. “Just as we said, isn’t it? Thought you wouldn’t stay there long.”

Rose had not stayed there long. She hadn’t wanted, after she found it, to stay long; but not for the reason that the younger Guides thought.

“You didn’t see the litter, of course,” the bulb planters were continuing. “We could have showed you that last summer. But I daresay you saw the \_\_\_\_\_”

“I saw a tremendous lot,” said Rose slowly.

Then suddenly, without meaning to, she told them exactly what she had seen.

“I saw such a tremendous lot,” said Rose slowly, “that it seems too beautiful. You know those names on the trees?”

“Rather.” The others were looking at her with some amaze in their eyes.

“I thought they were beautiful. I’m sure the trees thought so too. They may have been trippers and tramps, the people who did it, but they *were* people; so are we. And it seemed a sort of honourable scar that the tree was wearing—almost a decoration.”

“*What!*” Everybody listened open-mouthed.

“Well, to me, I mean. Perhaps you won’t think so. But they’d got there, you know, to the wood—the people. And they loved it tremendously, and they thought ‘I’ll leave my name here to show I’ve been.’ And they’ve chosen the best trees—like the Alpine Club making marks on their alpenstocks for every peak they’ve climbed.”

No reply. Everybody was gazing at Rose.

“You’d better see the litter, if you like those tree scratches, Rose,” said somebody in a scandalized tone.

“But I don’t. Oh, don’t misunderstand!” Rose’s cheeks were flushed. “It’s only that they don’t understand how to show their happiness—the people don’t. And to throw mud at the trespass notice—well, it’s showing their hate for it, because it’s not fair nor true, and they probably know it. Only, they’re showing that the wrong way too.”

There was silence.

“Wait till summer, Rose,” said somebody.

“But I’m not going to”—Rose’s tone was firm—“and I’ve been thinking ——” Her voice dropped. She told them of the little letter; she told them of the robin; she paused then.

“There’s something in it,” said somebody. “I mean, they have got a right there. But why do they abuse it so terrifically? Nobody would mind them if they were clean.”

“They don’t know yet,” said Rose. She went into the Rangers’ den and closed the door, leaving the younger Guides staring.

“There *is* something in it,” said they to each other, pausing for a moment. Then they continued their bulb sorting without more words.

It was a positively joyous Rose, however, who greeted the Rangers on her next meeting with the whole four at once.

“I say, Jane! You too, Sylvia! Oh, everybody!”

As though she had scored a century at a cricket match, or discovered the North Pole, or something like that, Rose looked.

“What on earth is it, Rose?”

They listened, however, when she told them. The Rangers were older. They did not interrupt Rose. Presently they looked at each other.

“Rose, that’s a topping idea. Only we ought to have thought of it ourselves,” said Lyn.

“We might have thought of the beginning of it”—it was Jane’s voice —“but it would always take Rose to think of that plan.”

For Rose had a plan. She had told it to the others with sparkling eyes.

“Oh, if we could make it ready for them, wouldn’t it be gorgeous! Anyhow, I’m going to. I know the rest of you are fearsomely busy, but I’m not. And I thought that if I tidied up there, and somehow lost it the name of the Scrubs, that next year——” Rose paused. “And that if the board came down, or——” She paused again. “Came down, and went up again, I thought, with something welcoming about it.”

“We’re not too busy,” returned Jane. “We’ll all help too.”

But it was Rose who spent most time in the woody part which had been called the Scrubs. She spent most of her time there doing, possibly, very little that showed, but somehow making the place welcoming instead of warningful to the trippers whose haunt it had become. The Rangers took the board down for her, and up it went with “something different” on it; the “something different” being Rose’s own idea. The younger Guides to whom Rose had spoken, realizing that something was up in the little stretch of woodland with the ugly name, left the field one afternoon and came across.

“Rose, are you there?” they called through the wall.

“Rather. Come in,” called Rose.

There was no flapping trespassers’ board creaking uneasily—as though it knew it should not be there—as before. The trees were bare; the initials of many who had cut their names were plain to see. The leaves still lay in heaps here and there—there wasn’t anything very different, perhaps, about the little woody place; but there seemed something different, somehow, to the Guides who peered in.

“It’s truly rather a jolly little wood,” they said.

“And it’s going to be jollier. Look!” Rose was sparkling with pleasure. “The other Rangers are going, somehow, to rig up a seat or two. Lyn and Sylvia can do it, and we’ll all help. And we’re going to make a big wastepaper basket sort of arrangement; we’re working at them now, and we mean to put them here and there. The notice will tell them why.”

“The notice?” The younger Guides looked up. “Why, it’s down!”

“Yes, but it’s going up again! Miss Blake said we might do it. You’re all to see it then. Miss Scott wants all the Guides to come.”

They all came to the opening of the People’s Wood.

It was a very simple little ceremony. While the Guides stood round, the Rangers together hoisted the trespassing board into position once more; but it was no longer a trespassing board. It had been cleaned and repainted by the Rangers themselves; the wording had been painted by Sylvia; all of them had helped.

“PLEASE KEEP ME BEAUTIFUL,” ran the clear letters. The request was signed “The People’s Wood.”

“That’s Rose,” said the younger Guides as they went back.

Six of them, however, returned rather shyly towards where the Rangers still stood. They were the six who had introduced Rose to the little spot when still its name was the Scrubs.

“I say, Rose, you’re jolly right. It’s a topping idea, and we wondered \_\_\_\_\_”

Possibly, so thought Rose anyway when she heard it, the younger Guides’ idea was the loveliest of all.

“I say, you know our bulbs? Well then, we thought—— We thought we’d like to do our bit too if you’d let us.”

“Of course,” returned Jane, as the Rangers listened.

“Well, it’s this. There aren’t many flowers in the wood, are there?”

“Rose has been planting roots,” Jane told them. “That’s what she’s been about. She sent for all kinds of flower-roots, and they’ll all be out in the early summer.”

“*Oh!*” The faces of the younger Guides looked rather disappointed.

“Well, we’d thought that our bulbs——” they paused. “Daffs in grass look jolly nice.”

“On our lawn at home Mummy’s grown snowdrops.”

“And as we’ve got quite a lot of sprouting daffs and snowdrops, and as the trippers—we mean people—generally turn up pretty early in the year, and daffs do last till over Easter——”

“*Oh!* It’s a gorgeous idea!” cried Rose.

By half-term, or a little over, the ground of the People’s Wood was studded with a secret treasure hoard. Down in the heart of the fallen leaves daffodils and snowdrops had been planted, ready to be up in the spring. Rose’s flowers would bloom later; the bulbs would flower first.

“Sure you don’t mind?” said the younger Guides to Rose rather anxiously.

“*Mind!*” repeated Rose.

They were trooping across the field together, the Rangers and the Guides who had helped too. The People’s Wood would be everybody’s interest now somehow, instead of being a worry and annoyance to the schoolgirls and a half-stolen kind of pleasure to the people who came.

“It’s been gorgeous,” sighed Rose, when the Rangers’ den was reached; “and gorgeouser and gorgeouser because everybody’s been in it, more or less. And it will be a kind of thing to do that will go on having to be done. We’ll have to keep the People’s Wood lovely now, and they’ll love it all the more.”

“But it took Rose to start the idea,” said Lyn.

“Pooh,” returned Rose. “That just happened. There’s only one thing that rather bothers me. I told Miss Scott that I’d learn up for the pathfinder’s badge, and I’ve done this instead.”

“Instead?” said Jane. Then she paused. “I, for one, think,” said the Rangers’ leader, “that you’ve jolly well found some sort of a path to let the people in!”

## CHAPTER XI

“But why on earth, Rose,” said Sylvia, “if you’re going to work for badges, as you say, don’t you do like the other four of us and work up for the Ranger’s star!”

“But,” said Rose, “I’ve only been a Ranger for such a tiny time.”

The wood was as ready as they could make it until spring should come. There were always odds and ends of work to be done, of course, but Rose found time to do most of those.

There was the making friends with the birds too; of which there were few in the cold wintry weather except the robins, many of whom were fairly tame already. But the People’s Wood was Rose’s abode on most of the hours when her school curriculum demanded out-of-door life with the minimum of effort which Rose could give.

Indoors, the making of rustic seats, their staining and decoration, was helped with by almost all the company. The beauty baskets too, as they were called by the girls, were in preparation for the time when the people would come again. While under the soil, in spots, every one of which was known to Rose anyhow, the plants and flowers were getting ready for the same purpose. There would be tiny sprouts soon of the leaves of the bulbs that the younger Guides had put in.

Meantime indoors Rose, working at her handicrafts in odd times, together with the other Rangers of the den, found life glorious if not altogether full.

“*Me!*” said Rose, staring. “But might I?”

“Whyever not?” returned the rest.

“But you’ve got all the Guide badges, so you know so much more.”

“But there are heaps of Rangers who join without being Guides first. You know that. We don’t consider you one of those, but I’m sure Miss Scott would say that it would be jollier for you to work with the rest of us towards the star rather than to work with the younger Guides for odd badges.”

“I might do both. It will be ages before I could get the star. And I’ve got rather used to working in odd times with the other Guides,” returned Rose.

Miss Scott agreed with her as to that. Partly for Rose's own sake, because the Rangers, high in school and with multifarious occupations which left only spare hours for Guide work, could not always work with Rose. But it was partly for the sake of the younger Guides themselves that Miss Scott deliberated while she listened to Jane.

"Yes. Why, of course Rose can work for the star. It is not too early. But, Jane——" Miss Scott paused.

"Yes, Miss Scott."

"Guiding is so very much helped if a girl like Rose——" Miss Scott paused, "works together with any younger ones who may possibly be feeling—shall we call it 'stale'? There is such a thing as having a 'stale Guide' or two in a patrol. There are one or two now. But Rose's keenness has been so infectious that, since she has popped in and out and worked with the rest, all those symptoms seem to have left the younger Guides. She has been looked up to, I think, all along for her courage; well, then there was her indomitable spirit in gaining her test. The whole school was with her during those dancing lessons that she would give, and did give so admirably. Then there has been the affair of the Scrubs. Rose has somehow illuminated the way for them. I want her to do the best for herself, but——"

Jane nodded.

"She would so like the star, and we are all working for it. Miss Scott, don't some of the badges come into the star? I mean, could she work up for those particular badges with the rest of the Guides? The book-lover's badge, for instance; all the rest of us gained that a year ago. Rose hasn't got it, though she knows far more than we do. That comes into the intelligence test for the star; and in handicraft she will have to hold the child-nurse test or some alternative—that's in the rules. So couldn't she work it that way?"

"To work with you both. Yes," Miss Scott smiled, "I will speak to Rose. That seems the best way. She will seem, too, a kind of link between Guides and Rangers. I am anxious for Rose to gain her star. With a girl who has come just to try how school will suit her, it is always not quite certain how long——"

Miss Scott was off.

Jane was off, too, to some duty or other; but Miss Scott's unfinished sentence remained with her. Rose had only been at Seal for rather more than half a term; she had seemed handicapped all round on her arrival—something of a "brave poor thing." But nobody who knew Rose really could



have used the word “poor” in connection with her. She seemed so much a part of the Rangers now; her chair seemed so indispensable to their den; she was so much a part of the whole of the Guides that Jane wondered whatever they had done before she came.

“She’ll get the star all right,” decided Jane.

Certainly Rose meant to. Miss Scott’s idea fitted in with her own wishes exactly. She read down the list of tests to be passed before the star could be gained, and smiled broadly. “I heard some of the Guides saying they were taking the book-lover’s badge; I’ll work with them. Half the Daffodil patrol are taking the child-nurse badge, Bunty and Barbara among them; I’ll adore working for that. I suppose I’ll have to be extra good if it’s to be up to Ranger standard—ooo!” Rose lay back. “To think that I’ll be working with you too all the time, and with the Ranger star ahead.”

“Not that we’ll have much time for star-gazing,” returned Mary. “We’ve got any amount of matches before end of term.”

Every Saturday between the half and the last week of term held a hockey match for Seal. Some of these would be played on their own ground against other schools in turn; one, at least, would not.

“There’s the Moreton Match on Saturday fortnight,” the Rangers reminded each other as they worked; “wouldn’t it be glorious if Rose could come to that!”

But Rose could not, glorious as the day of the Moreton Match always was. For it necessitated the hiring of a large omnibus to take the team to their fighting-ground, and since the omnibus provided seating accommodation for the whole school, the whole of Seal School, as per tradition, always went.

“Moreton does the same. They come here. We simply love that match better than all others,” Rose was informed. “It’s a long drive. You’d adore it. We pass the forest.”

“Oh!” Rose sat up. Barbara and Bunty had told her about that weeks ago. They had mentioned that they meant to stand up in the bus and see whether the Rangers’ pioneers’ hut was still standing weather-tight. “Oh, how I’d love to go! The People’s Wood is part of the real forest, isn’t it?”

“Yes, rather. Or was, of course. It’s quite likely that your own wood at home is too. That’s only twenty miles away, you see; and the forest used to stretch right across the county in the days before William Rufus, or some one, had the trees chopped down. Rose, it would be spiffing if you could see

it. But—don't expect to," Jane was speaking rather anxiously; "you see, the bus seats are fearfully hard, and it's a jolty contraption. You couldn't go. To say nothing of the fact that we stay there for three hours—at Moreton, I mean—and it's standing about most of the time watching the match. And then there'd be the drive back again. You couldn't. We oughtn't to have mentioned it."

"But the forest is only about four miles away, isn't it?" asked Rose, in rather a choky voice. She wanted more than anything to see the forest. Merely to drive past it would have been worth while. But Rose had borne a good many disappointments during the past year and a bit. This one, though somehow it seemed extra difficult, was another disappointment that she would, of course, bear too. She picked up the little Ranger book and began to study the other alternative badges for the Ranger star.

"Oh!" suddenly cried Rose.

She hadn't noticed it before. Under the intelligence group it was placed. A whole paragraph was there that she read slowly first to herself, and then read to herself again, before daring to voice her wish aloud. "To gain the intelligence badge, Rangers working for the star must——" there came a group of alternatives; and then, last of all, "must have spent at least half a day alone, or with a companion, in the country, observing the wild birds and animals, plants and flowers, and write a report."

"*Oh!*" cried Rose again. "Oh, listen! If I could go with you, only the four miles, and be put down, and spend my time alone. In the forest, you know. I needn't walk much. I'd just live there till you came back. And there's your pioneer hut. I could find that to rest in. And I'd be working for the star."

"*Rose,*" the Rangers gazed at her, "what a fearfully topping idea! Only \_\_\_\_\_"

"There isn't any 'only.' I've spent tons of time—nearly all the time there was—just that way before I came here. And there would be the hut, wouldn't there? And Barbara and Bunty, up in the dorm, once said that you often camped there."

"We do, in the summer. It's gorgeous. Oh, of course you'd love it. But, Rose——"

"There isn't any 'but.' I'm going to ask Miss Scott. Even if anything dire happened—and how could it, in a forest?—Bunty and Barbara told me that there's a woodcutter's cottage close there. Well!"

Nobody, after seeing Rose's sparkling eyes, could bring any objections to bear after that.

## CHAPTER XII

Rose was alone. She was alone on the edge of the great stretching forest of which her own little wood at home, and of which the People's Wood—whose name of the Scrubs was never mentioned now—had both, long ago, been a part.

She had driven down for the four miles in the omnibus with the hockey team and the rest of the girls. Rose's petition to Miss Scott had been carried to Miss Blake, and Miss Blake, after considering the matter, and consulting with the Guide-mistress and Jane, had agreed.

"Miss Blake, she wants it so tremendously."

"We could easily arrange for her to drive there comfortably, Jane."

"But, Miss Blake, that's not it exactly. She wants to go with us, and to feel like everybody else. That's *Rose*. And she chiefly wants to work up for her star—that half-day in the country part of it—and Rose is so used to woods and to being alone. It would be so gorgeous for her."

"One of the other girls, perhaps, might go with her, or a mistress," deliberated Miss Blake.

But that wouldn't have been the same. Miss Blake herself knew that. After thought she sent for Rose.

"Yes, Rose, I think you may. But first you must be introduced, by Jane or Miss Scott, to the cottage. A nice old woman lives there; and she must be at home, and ready to take you in if you grow cold or over-tired. The girls will be gone for five hours, at least. I could send for you before then, of course."

"But it's for the star. A half-day," pleaded Rose. "I could have rugs and things; and there's the pioneer hut. And it's the forest."

Really there seemed nothing against it at all, even for Rose. There were so few things that she could do. The rest of the girls were off to Moreton, as Miss Blake remembered. And Rose had rarely, at school, wanted anything except the everyday things. This seemed like something so specially after Rose's heart that the Head decided that it could be done. "Under those conditions, Rose."

"Oh yes." The conditions were simple enough.

The drive down had been glorious. To drive with all the rest out of the school gates, past the People's Wood, and up the long forest road, where walks took the other girls but had never taken Rose, was glorious enough. Everybody was pointing out scraps of interest to her too: the river, into which the forest stream ran; the first sight of the forest trees; they had almost forgotten the match ahead while Rose was there. When once she was settled in the forest, and the second stage of their drive began, no doubt it would be match talk all the way; but, just at first, it was Rose's drive.

The omnibus pulled up at last at a tiny little fencing, and Jane and Rose got down. Jane was armed with rugs; Rose following her. She turned back, with her eyes glistening, to wave good-bye to the rest.

“Good luck to your star, Rose!”

“Oh, thanks. I'll adore the whole time. More, much more, than your match!”

The others laughed as Rose disappeared through the trees.

There was only the introduction at the cottage to be made. Jane performed the necessary introductions, and the old country-woman bobbed in reply.

“Aye, sure, miss, I'll be home all day. The young lady's right welcome to come in and rest, if she likes. I've my daughter coming up from town. She likes to sit at home with me, she does, and talk. Aye, sure we'll be here, and a good fire too o' forest-tree wood.”

Rose and her rugs were deposited by the speeding Jane not far away. Across the little stream, which was a big stream at this time of year, they went.

“How far,” asked Rose breathlessly, “is pioneer hut?”

Jane pointed. There it was, hidden no longer now that the leaves were gone from the trees. It stood, some hundred yards distant, in a little clearing, taut and trim as when the Rangers had finished making it months ago.

“There, Rose. Now you ought to be safe and happy!”

“I should think so. Oh, Jane, good-bye. Good luck to the match.”

Rose was alone. It was long weeks since she had been alone with the trees altogether; she had grown so used to school with its world of girls that, at first, Rose waited almost breathlessly as Jane's steps died away. Then after a moment or two, in what seemed like the far distance, she heard the

sound of wheels. The omnibus had started again towards Moreton with all the girls. Rose was really alone.

Just for half a day she would go back to the old times before she knew the Guides; she would remember the children who were guarding the little wood; she herself would be alone altogether with the trees and wild things of the forest.

She prowled around a little before even investigating the Rangers' hut. She stooped down and smoothed the mosses on the outstretching limbs of the old trees that had stood there for such centuries and knew, perhaps, so many secrets. Rose herself had no secrets, but if she had had any, she knew she would tell them to trees.

It was breathlessly beautiful, somehow, wandering like this, watching and wondering and—all the time as part of her happiness—working for the Ranger's star. That seemed to bring everything together, somehow, into a lovely glorious whole. Rose, thinking as she went, did not realize how much strength even a little walk took from her, until suddenly she felt that it was time to rest a little in the Rangers' hut.

She was very tired when she reached it, but it was beautiful inside. The Rangers had lined it with soft moss from top to bottom; it felt like a part of the wood that had grown into a shelter rather than a house made with hands.

“St. Francis was left alone.” Rose opened the *Little Flowers* that she had brought from the library that morning. It was her own copy; but it was more bethumbed now, for the other Rangers had read it. It looked even more “loved” perhaps than it had looked when Rose had given it to the Rangers on the day of her election weeks ago. She knew every place in it; she turned without trouble to the part she wanted.

“A thick wooded holt

He entered, the which many thorns and shrubs  
Had shaped to semblance of a little hut,”

read Rose to herself.

It was a very long time since she had felt so gloriously happy, and more and more happinesses came back to her memory as she sat there remembering: The children of the wood; Guides, and all that the Rangers and Guides had taught her; the People's Wood; and this, that seemed, somehow, to hold it all.

Rose sat back, and looked through the trees.

All the trees were bare now; she could see, like a silver torrent, between the trunks which stood between herself and the water, the flooded waters of the little stream. There was a strong bridge, built, no doubt, with the idea of winter floods, not very far off, and she would cross that to reach the cottage later on. But just now Rose was more than content to sit still, warmly wrapped in her rug, and to think.

Chiefly, perhaps, she thought of the children who were guarding her wood. At anyrate they were in her thoughts when suddenly she saw—what Rose had not expected to see.

A tiny running figure.

A very tiny figure, and some way off. The child, whoever she might be, was on the other side of the water. Rose suddenly got up.

She took a few steps forward quickly too, for the child had stopped short at the waterside. She was peering into the torrent as Rose came through the trees. Then suddenly she stood up, her lip quivering, and the eyes of Rose and the child met.

It was Janie—little Janie of the wood.

“Janie! oh, Janie darling! How did you get here?” called Rose.

“Miss! Miss! Miss!” yelled Janie. “I’s come to see Granny’s hotter. I telled you, miss, I would. I see’d en ’ere in summer. My nunkle showed me ’im. And I was feared; but I’s not feared now, because of the wood, miss. I’s e going to tell the hotter so, I am.”

“Janie—go back!” called Rose.

But Janie didn’t. In summer-time the stream ran dimpling and rippling over the stones; the holes in its bank were clear to see, even by tiny ones, and easy to investigate. But at this time of year in the wood things were different. And how could Janie know?

“Miss——” There came a scrambling and a splash. “Oh, Miss Rose!”

Any other Guide could have done it. It was not very difficult work for a girl of Rose’s size to slip down the opposite side, and to reach hold of the frightened Janie, and to stand knee-deep, holding the child safe.

“Miss! Miss!” Janie was safe now—safe from the water. But how to get her up the steep bank. Rose did not know. Her back was aching terribly as she held on. “Oh, Janie, how did you come?” she whispered.

Janie whispered too, because she and Rose had always whispered in the little wood at home.

“I comed to my Granny what I told you, miss. She ’ad the hotter. An’ I don’ mind being wet, miss, ’cos you’s ’olding me.”

“Janie, could you, if I helped you, climb the bank?”

It took time, and it took much strength from Rose, before the little thing had reached the top.

“You come too, miss?” whispered Janie.

“No. You go back. You can send your uncle, or——”

The pain in Rose’s back was so great that she hardly knew it was pain. Unconsciously she gripped hard to the branch of a tree whose boughs hung down to the water. She lay there, wondering dimly what had happened. It hardly seemed true somehow. Then, safe from the water, by reason of the grip that she still held of the tree branch, Rose thought no longer, though she still lay quietly there.



## ENVOI

“Yes, it’s the old trouble,” said the doctor.

He was Rose’s doctor from home.

Her father was there too, and her mother; they had been wired for late in the afternoon.

Rose was in the san now, still lying very quiet.

She remembered everything again, however; how Janie had come in search for brother otter, and how she had fallen in. She did not remember that Janie’s uncle had lifted her from the bank of the stream, where she held so fast to the branch of one of the trees that part of it was still in her hand when they lifted her.

She had been laid in the little cottage bedroom, where Janie’s Granny and Mother, and a whispering Janie, had watched her while the woodcutter went with the news to school.

There had been no Rose waiting in the cottage for the match-winners on their return. Only a story that seemed almost impossible to believe.

But it was quite believable. The doctor said so. “Even slighter effort than that might have done it. Yes, it means bed again, Miss Rose.”

Rose lay very still.

“At home, of course, darling,” said her mother. “We’re taking you back to-morrow morning.”

Next morning she went.

All the Guides and Rangers stood silently waiting for her as she was carried down. There was silence, almost like the silence in the wood, Rose thought.

“Mummy,” she whispered, “may I speak to Jane?”

Jane came forward, a trifle pale, but steady of chin.

“Jane, I’ve loved it. I’ll go on loving it. Tell them that. And I’ll always be a Ranger wherever I am. And, Jane, even if I don’t come back, tell them I’ll promise to win my star.”

Then the car rolled off, but somehow as, quietly and without words, the Guides and Rangers, when the sight of it was no more, turned to enter the doors of Seal House, it seemed to every one of them that Rose herself went with them through the Guides' room and into the Rangers' den.

THE END

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT  
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[The end of *Ranger Rose* by Ethel Talbot]