The Motor Maids by Rose, Shamrock and Thistle

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"THERE IS SOME MYSTERY ABOUT HIM, I AM SURE."

THE MOTOR MAIDS BY ROSE, SHAMROCK AND THISTLE

BY

KATHERINE STOKES

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR MAIDS' SCHOOL DAYS," "THE MOTOR MAIDS
BY PALM AND PINE," "THE MOTOR MAIDS ACROSS
THE CONTINENT," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES L. WRENN

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CHAPTER I.—THE FIRST DAY OUT.

"The water's very black this morning. Lydies wouldn't bithe in it," called the voice of the stewardess outside the stateroom door.

"This lydy would," answered Wilhelmina Campbell from the top berth. "She's only talking," she added in a lower tone. "A cold salt bath, please, stewardess."

"Very well, mum. Will the other lydy have a bath?"

"Nancy, hot or cold?" demanded Billie, dangling one foot out of the berth to attract her friend's attention.

Groans were the only reply of Nancy Brown.

"Not seasick already, and this only the first night out?"

"I don't think I'll last through the day, Billie," said Nancy in a weak voice. "I'm sure I don't want to last, even if I do," she added with Irish inconsequence.

"Why, you poor sick thing," exclaimed Billie, climbing down and leaning sympathetically over the other girl. "Can't I do anything for you?"

"Yes," groaned Nancy. "Leave me alone."

"Won't you have a little hot tea or a soft-boiled egg,—just heated through, you know?"

"Eggs!" Nancy shrieked, and buried her face in her pillow with a shudder of horror.

"It will be all right, Nancy-Bell, if you can just make up your mind to drink something hot and come on deck. Lots of food and fresh air will always cure seasickness," added Billie with a healthy ignorance of upset stomachs.

"Eat something and go on deck?" mumbled Nancy from the depths of her pillow. "I couldn't keep it down till I got there, no matter if it was—air."

Nevertheless, Billie ordered hot tea from the stewardess as she slipped on her dressing gown and started on her pilgrimage to the bathroom. The ship was rolling mightily, and not many people were bathing that morning, but Billie was an old traveler, and she staggered cheerfully along the ship's passage, and in fifteen minutes had emerged glowing from her cold plunge. On the way back she stopped at the stateroom occupied by her cousin, Miss Helen Campbell, and her two other friends, Elinor Butler and Mary Price.

"Come in," called her cousin's voice in a sad, colorless tone.

"Why, dearest Cousin Helen," exclaimed Billie, bursting into the stateroom, "you aren't seasick, too?"

"I can't say I feel very robust, my dear," exclaimed the little lady with the ghost of a smile.

"Don't you think it would do you good to come on deck?" began Billie.

"My dear, I couldn't lift a little finger if the ship were sinking," and Miss Campbell turned her face to the wall and refused to speak again.

"But, Mary—but, Elinor——" began Billie again, feeling something like a race horse who has no competitors.

Mary made no reply. Her face was white and her lips set as she endeavored to draw on her clothes.

Elinor smiled wanly.

"I believe you are all seasick," exclaimed Billie accusingly.

"I'm not in the least seasick," replied Elinor, drawing herself up proudly, "but I've had an attack of indigestion. Something I ate last night for dinner disagreed with me,—I think it was the chocolate ice cream——"

At the mere mention of chocolate ice cream Mary collapsed on her berth and Miss Campbell groaned aloud.

"Dear! dear!" said Billie softly, closing the door and stealing away to her stateroom. "Plague, pestilence and famine aren't worse than seasickness."

Only proud Elinor braved the dangers of breakfast that morning with Billie. Mary Price, stricken down by the memory of chocolate ice cream, could not lift her head from the pillow. Nancy refused to speak and Miss Campbell lay in a

comatose state and declined all nourishment.

You will remember that in a former volume,—"The Motor Maids Across the Continent,"—it was prophesied by a Gypsy fortune teller in San Francisco that Miss Campbell and the Motor Maids would soon take a long voyage across stormy waters to a foreign land. Nothing had seemed more improbable at the time, and the travelers had laughed incredulously. Nevertheless, the Comet, their faithful red motor car, was stored at that moment in the ship's hold with other baggage, and the four friends and Miss Helen Campbell were now sailing on the broad Atlantic.

It was Billie and her Cousin Helen, those two insatiate wanderers, who had planned the journey, and it was Billie's indulgent father, Mr. Duncan Campbell, who had actually cabled his permission all the way from Russia.

Through raging seas they had sailed, then, as the old Gypsy had prophesied, for they had scarcely said farewell to the towers of New York that stand clustered together at one end of the island, and sailed around Sandy Hook, when they met with a gale that rocked the deeps and churned the waters into foam. All night the boat rolled and pitched, and all night the suffering passengers groaned in their berths; all save that incorrigible Billie Campbell, who slept the sleep of the perfectly healthy and snuggled under her covers comfortably when the wind whistled through the cordage.

Scarcely a dozen people appeared in the dining-room that morning, and Billie and Elinor were the only women. Elinor almost collapsed as they passed the belt of cooking smells on the way to the dining-room. They had not taken one of the larger and more expensive ships on which science has eliminated all offensive smells of the kitchen. But it's a wonderful thing what will power will do, and strengthened by orange juice and hot tea, Elinor's fortitude returned, the color came into her cheeks and the light to her eyes.

"If seasick people would only eat," Billie was saying, "they wouldn't mind the rocking a bit. It's that empty feeling that makes things so bad."

Elinor nodded her head. She still couldn't trust herself to reply.

"The mistake seasick people make," observed a young man about twenty-one, sitting opposite to them, "is to drink slops. Solids are the thing,—like this, for instance."

The two girls regarded his breakfast for one brief moment; then Elinor fled from the table like a hunted soul. He was eating bananas, cereal, chops, fried eggs, finnan haddie,—which smelt abominably at that unfortunate time,—and griddle cakes.

"It's too bad I mentioned 'slops,'" he observed to Billie in an apologetic tone. "It's a dangerous word to use on a ship. On land it's safe enough."

"It wasn't slops that made her sick," replied Billie indignantly. "It was the

sight of—of so—much——"

"Coarse food?" he finished.

Billie nodded.

"And just as I'd got her to order a poached egg on toast, too! It's a perfect shame. It was that smelly fish that did the business."

"Smelly?" echoed the stranger smiling. His face was as round and merry as the harvest moon. "Why, I always loved the perfume of finnan haddie. It's sweeter than rose-geranium to me; a nice old-sea-y fragrance that hangs about a fisherman's hut on the beach after a good catch."

"I don't think I could ever be poetic about that smell," cried Billie, laughing in spite of herself; "but you must be used to the sea to love even the odor of old fish."

"Faith, and I am," answered the stranger with a touch of brogue in the voice. "I was brought up on a rocky coast and lived on the water as much as on the land."

"Where was that?"

"In Ireland, if you must know."

"And is your home there still?"

Instantly there was the most extraordinary change on the countenance of the young Irishman. Billie was startled and shocked by the look of hatred which darkened his eyes and drew down the corners of his mouth.

"My home is there," he mumbled; "but it is no longer my home. Others now occupy it."

It is always embarrassing to surprise strangers in sudden emotions, and Billie quickly changed the subject. It would take Nancy Brown, she thought, to manage this wild Irishman, who was so quick to reveal his feelings whatever they happened to be.

"We are going to Ireland," she said. "A friend who's traveling with us has relatives there. Her name is Butler. Did you ever hear of that name in Ireland?"

"Butler? Sure. It's a good name and there's plenty of 'em left in the old country. Butlers are thick in Ireland. They're a fine family, some rich ones and some poor ones, and none of 'em kin to each other. They're a fightin' lot."

Billie laughed.

"They're a fightin' lot in America," she said. "At least they are around West Haven. But you mustn't say so to my friend. She's very proud of her blood, and we're making a special trip to the west coast of Ireland just to meet her cousins."

While Billie was eating her poached eggs and breakfast bacon, her new friend had waded through his repast with amazing rapidity. As he was finishing off the last griddle cake, he was joined by an old man who reminded Billie curiously of a Shetland pony. His body was small and a thick growth of shaggy hair covered his large head and hung in his eyes. His face was rugged and strong, and

his black eyes twinkled with a kind of secret amusement toward the entire world and everybody in it.

"Good morning, Feargus O'Connor. How's your appetite? Just a bird's, eh? Nothing but toast and tea?"

Feargus smiled placidly at the empty plates in front of him.

"You see naught before me, sir. It might mean anything,—all or nothing."

Billie could not help laughing. She liked this funny young Irishman with his good-natured face and his kind blue eyes that could be fierce at a moment's notice. She rather liked the other man, too. He was very old, but his voice had a wonderfully vibrant quality in it, like that of a person in the habit of speaking in public. Perhaps he was an actor. It was always fun to guess what people were in traveling. Billie would almost rather not discover their identities in order to weave romances about them. Feargus, she imagined, was a young student, returning to Ireland to visit his people. She would have liked to linger at table a little with this agreeable pair of strangers, but she felt that it was her duty to return to her unhappy friends and minister to them, if there was anything that they would allow to be ministered. When Billie and her father had traveled together they had always made it a point to talk to everybody within talking distance at table and on deck, and Billie was not in the least embarrassed, therefore, at having been drawn into conversation with Feargus O'Connor.

As she rose to leave the dining-room she heard him say to his friend:

"Where's Victor?"

"He was pretty low until I gave him the infallible remedy," answered the other. "He's all right now. I daresay he'll be along in a few moments."

"Oh," cried Billie, "do you know something that's good for seasickness?"

"You're not ill?" he asked with a note of surprise in his voice, seeing that her cheeks were ruddy with health and that she showed no signs of precipitating herself from the place as people often did in ship's dining-rooms.

"No, no; but my cousin and my three friends are all very ill and I don't know what to do for them."

"I was at one time a physician on a steamer," said the man, "and I have cured many cases of seasickness. Do you think your friends would permit me to prescribe?"

"Have you really cured them quite quickly?" asked the young girl innocently.

"It certainly worked with me, that remedy," put in Feargus. "And I was about to pass when you took my case. I ought to remember it because it was our first meeting, Mr. Kalisch."

"So it was."

"You really have a remedy for seasickness?" demanded Billie again.

"It has worked in most cases," said Mr. Kalisch. "I should be glad to give it to your friends if they are willing."

"I'm sure they would be very foolish not to be," exclaimed Billie. "I will run and see and let you know in five minutes."

Billie found a deplorable state of affairs in the two staterooms. Elinor had completely succumbed to the miseries of the disease and lay in her berth as white and still as a corpse. Miss Campbell was groaning to herself, and Mary was weeping silently. As for Nancy in the next room, she was too miserable to reply to her friend's inquiry and buried her face in her pillow.

"Cousin Helen," said Billie, "I'm going to bring a doctor in to see you who has an infallible cure for seasickness. Will you see him?"

There was only a moan for answer. The ship was filled with unhappy sounds; Billie felt almost ashamed to be so strong in the midst of all of this misery.

"It sounds very much like the Inferno," she thought as she hurried downstairs to the dining-room again.

"Mr. Kalisch, it would be very kind of you to come and see my friends," she said. "They are all of them very ill."

"I will go with you at once," answered the man, gulping down a last mouthful of coffee.

You will perhaps be surprised that even Billie's confiding nature permitted her to engage this strange physician to see her friends; but the young girl had a keen perception for honest dark eyes and lips that met in a resolute line. Indeed, she felt herself liking this Mr. Kalisch so much that even before they reached the stateroom she was inspired with confidence in his powers.

"Here they are," she said, leading him into the presence of her stricken friends. It was difficult to stand up straight with the rocking of the ship, and the small shaggy-haired man braced himself against the side of the berth and felt Miss Campbell's pulse.

"You feel quite ill, madam?" he asked.

"Quite," she answered faintly, opening her eyes and closing them again wearily.

"You have some pain?"

"No," she replied, looking at the doctor again and this time keeping the lids apart as the strange dark eyes held her attention.

It seemed to Billie almost a minute that he stood looking into the depths of her cousin's eyes. Then he took out of his pocket a small case containing little bottles, like those of homeopathic doctors.

"I'm going to give you a little pill," he said. "You will sleep an hour after taking it and you will wake up refreshed and well, ready to eat some breakfast and go out on deck."

Opening a narrow box in the case he took out a brown pill which Miss Campbell promptly swallowed. Then she turned over on her side and dropped off to sleep.

Mr. Kalisch treated the girls in exactly the same way, and they took their pills without a murmur. One of the tiny brown spheres fell on the bed and Billie took it and touched it with the tip of her tongue.

"I wonder if it will put me to sleep?" she thought.

She tasted it again, then calmly chewed it up and swallowed it. But she felt no inclination to sleep as the others had done.

After administering a brown pill to Nancy, who responded to treatment almost before it was given and fell asleep like a baby immediately, Mr. Kalisch took his departure. Billie tiptoed to the door after him.

"Were the pills made of brown bread?" she asked, smiling.

"How did you find it out?" he demanded, the humorous look deepening in his eyes.

"I chewed one of them up."

The doctor gave her a delightful smile.

"Never tell them," he said. "Let it be a little secret between you and me. Not even Feargus O'Connor knows that he was cured by a 'suggestion pellet.' For some reason it always makes people mad to know that they have been taking bread instead of medicine."

"But it was something else, wasn't it, really?"

"Just pure bread and nothing more."

"But your eyes?" she persisted.

"Just your imagination, my dear young lady," he answered, smiling again as he hurried away.

Nevertheless, in another two hours, Billie had bundled her friends into their steamer chairs on deck, and they were drinking hot broth with much relish.

It was true that the storm had subsided. The wind had died down and the sun was shining cheerfully. Perhaps, after all, it was the change in the weather that had effected so complete a cure.

CHAPTER II.—LITTLE ARTHUR.

When a ship is small and the passengers are few, it becomes a floating home for one family. Everybody comes to know everybody else very well indeed after the second day out. The captain is the father of the family, and there is a great deal of talk about small, unimportant things.

So it was with the ship which bore our Motor Maids and Miss Helen Campbell to Europe. Every morning at eleven o'clock when the steward appeared with a tray of bouillon and biscuit, certain of the ship's forty passengers gathered about the Motor Maids in friendly intercourse. At least, already it seemed every morning, because this made the second time.

Reclining lazily in steamer chairs or leaning on the deck rail, the four girls chatted with their new friends.

"As I was saying," observed Nancy to Feargus O'Connor, the young man whose dish of finnan haddie had made Elinor so ill the first day out, and who proved to be the secretary of the older man, Mr. Kalisch, "there is some mystery about him, I am sure."

"Mystery about whom?" demanded Billie from the depths of her chair.

"Mystery about little Arthur, of course."

"And who is little Arthur?" asked Mr. Kalisch.

"Little Arthur is little Arthur," replied Nancy. "We really don't know."

"You mean that horrid little boy who is always with the three men?" asked Mrs. Alonzo Le Roy-Jones of Castlewood, Virginia.

Nancy nodded politely. She did not care for this over-dressed, high-voiced woman who talked of the Le Roy-Jones family and their past glories to anybody who would listen to her.

"But he is not horrid, mamma," put in her daughter, Marie-Jeanne Le Roy-Jones. "When you saw him crying he was suffering. He is very delicate."

"Marie-Jeanne, a Le Roy-Jones never cried from pain, no, not even when wounded on the battlefield——"

"But, mother, the Le Roy-Joneses were never on a battlefield at the age of ten——"

"Don't answer back, I beg of you, Marie. It is so *bourgeois*, so common."

Mrs. Le Roy-Jones turned coldly away from her daughter, who was a plain girl and wore her fussy clothes with a discontented air.

"Here he comes," called Feargus. "He is a funny little chap with such old ways. I talked with him a moment this morning, but his guardians are so careful they won't let any one come near him."

"Who is the child?" asked Miss Campbell, at last revived from a morning nap.

"I tell you, we don't know, Cousin. Nobody has ever taken the trouble to look him up on the passenger list. He is called Arthur by the tall man in blue,

and that's all we know."

Mr. Kalisch shook back his shaggy hair and looked carefully at the little boy, who now approached walking between two tall young Englishmen.

Just as the child came opposite the company, he stopped and put his hand to his heart. His face turned very pale and tears came into his eyes.

The two young men were so engrossed in their conversation that they did not notice him swaying dizzily. It was Mr. Kalisch who caught him in his arms.

"Oh, my heart! My heart!" cried the little fellow.

In a moment the other passengers had surrounded him, as people will do at such times, partly from curiosity, partly from sympathy.

"Give him air, my friends," called Mr. Kalisch, as he laid Arthur on a steamer rug that Billie had spread on the deck for the purpose.

"Where's Dr. Benton?" demanded one Englishman of the other.

"I'll run and fetch him," replied the man hurrying away.

In the meantime, Mr. Kalisch and the Englishman were kneeling beside little Arthur, who had turned as white as a corpse and very blue about the lips. The moments dragged slowly and everybody stood anxiously by in deep silence. Presently the man who had gone in search of the doctor returned.

"I can't find him," he said, "or the ship's surgeon, either. By Jove, what are we going to do, Bobbie?"

"Mr. Kalisch is a doctor," put in Billie.

Mr. Kalisch was already feeling the boy's heart and pulse.

"His pulse is very faint," he said.

The two men exchanged frightened glances.

Mr. Kalisch drew from his inner pocket a small medicine case and took out a phial filled with white liquid, with which he moistened the child's lips.

"Arthur," he said in a voice that seemed somehow to come from another sphere, "Arthur, are you asleep?"

The child opened his eyes and smiled.

"You feel quite well, now, don't you, my boy?"

"I'm never quite well," answered Arthur. "The doctor says I'm very delicate, and steamers always make me ill."

"What a shame," said Mr. Kalisch. "There's lots of fun on a steamer, too, for a jolly boy. There's shuffle board, and hide and seek, and animals."

"What is animals?"

"I'll tell you all about it after lunch. In the meantime, you're going to take a fine nap and when you wake up you will be feeling like a fighting cock, and then we'll play the game of animals. Perhaps the young ladies will join in, and Feargus and the others. Do you ever take medicine?"

"Lots of it," replied Arthur proudly.

"Here is a pill. It's not a bit nasty. These ladies have all taken the same kind of pill. It cured them of seasickness."

"I don't mind medicine," said Arthur. "I'm quite used to it, I have to take so much. What will this do?"

"It will make you well. You will sleep for an hour and then you will wake up hungry and happy, and the first thing you'll say when you come on deck will be 'Telemac,'—that's my name, you know,—'what about animals?'"

Telemac Kalisch then drew forth one of the small brown pellets and put it between the boy's lips.

"It's not an opiate, Doctor?" asked one of the men uneasily.

Mr. Kalisch shook his head without taking his eyes off the boy's.

"You feel better already, eh? The blood is coming back to your face."

"I do feel better," replied Arthur. "I think I'll go in now, Bobbie."

"Shall I carry you?" asked the young man called Bobbie.

"No, I'll walk," said the child starting down the deck and then turning back. "Thank you, Telemac," he called. "I like you very much. Don't forget—after lunch."

There was an air of authority about the child that was as pathetic as it was amusing, as he moved away.

"Poor little man!" exclaimed Telemac Kalisch. "Poor little fellow!"

"The suggestion pellet, again," thought Billie, smiling slightly. "Was he really ill?" she asked aloud.

"He's delicate," answered Telemac. "Continuous nursing and doctoring would make an invalid of Atlas, himself."

"The Le Roy-Jones, of Castlewood Manor, Virginia," began the languid personage of that name with an elegant drawl,—but the elements themselves prevented her finishing her aristocratic recital, and Mrs. Le Roy-Jones became the sport of the breezes. A mischievous little puff of wind lifted the brim of her youthful hat, with invisible fingers plucked one of her false curls from her hair, and blew it along the deck.

"Oh, mother, why will you wear those things?" exclaimed Marie-Jeanne blushing, as she chased the wisp of hair followed by Feargus and the Motor Maids, all of them glad to find something to laugh at.

Her mother clinched her bony hands angrily.

"Insolent girl!" she said, under her breath.

Miss Campbell turned coldly away. There was something very pathetic to her about this poor battered creature, who looked, as Nancy had said, as if she had been hanging on a hook with her clothes in an old forgotten closet for a long time, so faded she was and full of wrinkles. But when she scolded her unhappy daughter, Miss Campbell could not endure her.

"She is a splendid young woman, ma'am," said Telemac Kalisch. "She has a fine, serious face, and if she were allowed to pursue her bent, she would probably grow beautiful."

"Pray, what do you mean by my daughter's 'tastes'?" demanded the shabby mother. "She has no bent, so far as I know."

"That is because you have never made your daughter's acquaintance. She is very much attached to something you have never taken the trouble to notice. But in your heart, you know what it is."

Mrs. Jones gave him an embarrassed glance and hurried away.

"What a strange man you are, Mr. Kalisch," exclaimed Miss Campbell. "You seem to read people's minds like open books."

"No, no," he answered. "Don't attach any such brilliant qualities to me. With a little practice in observing and talking to people, any one may guess their tastes and inclinations. It was only by the merest accident that I found out what poor Marie-Jeanne has been wishing for all her life."

"But what is it?" interrupted Miss Helen.

"It's a secret, but I'll tell you. She wants to cook."

"To cook?"

"Certainly. She has lived a wandering life in cheap hotels and boarding houses always with her mother, and she wants a home with a kitchen in it. She told me so herself. She wants to make the dishes her father loved,—vegetable soup and bread pudding and gingerbread."

"Good heavens," cried Miss Campbell wiping the moisture from her eyes, "I should never have thought so from glancing at that unhappy, gaudily dressed girl. What a world! What a world!"

"When Marie-Jeanne, whose name I suspect was once Mary-Jane, becomes a cook," said the man, "her world will be set to rights."

"And what do you make of the little boy?" asked Miss Campbell.

Telemac shook his head.

"I've not been able to place him," he said.

"He might be——" but the lunch call sounded, and our young girls and their friends came bounding down the deck laughing and talking gayly.

CHAPTER III.—AMONG THE PASSENGERS.

"We are simply wanderers, Marie-Jeanne and I," Mrs. LeRoy-Jones was saying to an interested audience of four girls. Marie-Jeanne was not present. "Simply tramps. We prefer Europe because of our aristocratic connections there, you know. We visit among the aristocracy."

"Where?" asked Billie rather bluntly.

"My friend, the Baroness Varitzy, has a cawstle in Austria and moves in the most exclusive society. I always attend receptions at her home and am often the only untitled person present."

Nancy rolled her blue eyes back until only the whites were visible, a trick she had when she wanted to laugh and didn't dare. Billie looked stern, Elinor disgusted, and little Mary rather sorrowful.

"We are not rich, you know," continued the strange woman. "Oh, dear no. We have so little, Marie-Jeanne and I. But we enjoy life. We shall visit on the estate of the Countess di Lanza this summer. She is a friend, you know, of the Archduchess Leopold Salvata, who married a nephew of the Emperor Franz Josef. The arch-duchess has just erected a new palace in Vienna which has sixty salons in it,—think of it. Entertaining in Austrian society is done on a grand scale. And I am always received everywhere because of my aristocratic connections."

"Then you have traveled a great deal, Mrs. Le Roy-Jones?" asked Billie, trying to draw the poor woman away from her obsessions.

"Everywhere, my dear. All the fashionable resorts of Europe are familiar to us. We should be delighted to take you under our wing. Now, if there is any room in your motor for two——"

The girls exchanged horrified glances.

"What place do you consider the most beautiful you ever saw?" here interrupted Mary with quick tact.

"Porto Fino in Italy, dear. Queen Margharita calls it 'il Paradiso.'"

Even scenery must have an aristocratic sanction before it could be considered beautiful by Mrs. Jones.

"But, dear, as I was remarking, if your motor will hold——"

"Kechew! Kechew!" Nancy was seized with a sneezing fit.

"It's time for shuffleboard," cried Billie. "I do wonder where the others are."

It was a brilliant spring day and all the passengers were on deck. Miss Helen was taking a stroll with some friends. Mr. Kalisch could be seen in the distance reading a book. The other passengers were stretched in their steamer chairs or talking in groups.

"Who said shuffleboard?" called a cheerful voice, and Feargus O'Connor, his face as ruddy as the harvest moon, emerged from a passage-way nearby.

Victor Pulaski, a young Russian, followed, with several others of the younger passengers.

"We are all here except Marie-Jeanne," observed Billie, determined to draw the forlorn young girl into their pleasures.

"My daughter is not well. She is in her stateroom," put in Mrs. Jones.

The deck was marked and the game soon in full swing. Mary Price slipped away and went down to the Jones' stateroom, which was one of the less expensive kind somewhere in the depths of the ship. There were no second cabin passengers on board.

Mary tapped timidly on the door, which was flung open almost instantly by Marie-Jeanne herself. There was a flush on her cheeks and she looked almost pretty for the first time since Mary had known her.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I thought you were the stewardess. Does mother want me?"

"Oh, no," answered Mary. "I came down to see how you were. Your mother said you were not well."

Marie-Jeanne's face flushed angrily.

"I am quite——" she began, and interrupted herself with a hopeless little gesture. "It was sweet of you to come down. I'm not used to such attentions. You see, I'm doing housework,—washing clothes this morning."

Mary slipped her arm around the other's waist.

"I believe you are happier when you are working, Marie-Jeanne," she said.

"I am, indeed. I would rather live in two rooms and cook in one of them, than stay at the best *pension* in all Europe. Oh, Mary, have you got a home?"

"Yes," replied Mary. "My mother and I have to work to keep it, but we have one."

"Oh, how I love to work," cried Marie-Jeanne.

She then proceeded to take six handkerchiefs from an improvised clothes line hung across the stateroom. She sprinkled them with a little water, rolled them in a neat pile, and with quite a professional manner, tested a little iron heating on an alcohol stove.

"Would you like to see me iron?" she demanded. "I do the family wash in this way. It saves lots of money, and, well,—it quiets me."

"Quiets you?"

"Yes; you see, sometimes I have a feeling I'd like to scream or break something, and when that comes on me, I just turn all the linen out of the clothes bag and wash clothes until I'm tired out."

"What a funny girl you are," laughed Mary. "Do you spend all your time abroad?" she added.

"Most of it. We only go back when——" the poor girl paused and wrinkled her brows, "when we have to," she finished in a low voice. "But there is something I like better than washing, Mary," she went on gayly. "You would never guess

that it's cooking. I have learned to make a great many dishes. I am sure I could cook an entire dinner with soup and roasted chicken and peas and potatoes and something awfully good for dessert. I know several desserts. Sometimes we take lodgings,—mamma detests them, but—well, sometimes we have to, and then I cook, oh, such good things! We are going into lodgings this time in London for a few weeks, and I shall be very busy. Perhaps you would come——" she paused. "No, mother would never consent to it. We never receive any visitors when we are in lodgings."

Marie-Jeanne sighed. Mary thought of the difference between Marie-Jeanne's "mamma" and her own beautiful mother, who worked so hard and was so dignified and noble. Her heart went out to the poor girl and she determined to make a friend of her if possible.

"Why don't you come on deck, Marie-Jeanne? Do stop work now. It's almost lunch time."

Marie-Jeanne extinguished the alcohol lamp and prepared to follow her friend aloft.

"I never had a friend before, Mary," she exclaimed, locking her arm shyly into the other's.

On deck a fresh wind had sprung up and every little wave wore a whitecap. The spray blew into their faces, tossed their loose locks and blew their skirts out like balloons. A game of "catcher" was going on, and the two girls were greeted with cries of joyous laughter and shouts of merriment. Telemac Kalisch was "old man" and he was chasing the others. Little Arthur was in the game and his shrill cries rang above the others'. He was a nimble child and had just slipped through Telemac's hands, when a man rushed from the salon and hurried down the deck. He had a thin, cadaverous face with a beaked nose, and he wore enormous horn spectacles. His chin was slightly receding and he had weak, pale eyes.

He paused in front of Billie, who happened to be running hand in hand with Arthur at the moment.

"I beg your pardon," he said angrily, "but are you aware that you happen to be endangering the life of a human being by your mad behavior?"

Billie flushed hotly.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Do you wish to be a murderess, young woman?" he exclaimed in a furious voice. "Has it not been made sufficiently clear to you that a certain person who shall be nameless is the victim of a terrible disease which affects his heart, and one dash up and down this deck might do him forever?"

Billie was silent. She had never been nearer bursting into tears in her life than at that moment, and not for worlds would she have trusted her voice before this brutal Englishman.

"I cannot imagine where the tutors are," exclaimed the man, who was Arthur's physician, F. Benton, M. D.

The others had gathered curiously around her and Billie felt that she was the center of an embarrassing episode. She wished that some one would defend her, and she was grateful to Mr. Kalisch for breaking into the conversation.

"If you blame any one, blame me and not a young girl," said Telemac. "I am entirely responsible for the game." The doctor gave him a contemptuous glance. "I do not agree with you. The individual you speak of, who shall be nameless, is not troubled with a disease in any way. He was perfectly well a moment ago. If you wish to make him the victim of any such absurd notions, you must have extremely good reasons of your own."

The two men eyed each other coldly. Then Billie, who had been so brutally treated, was emboldened to speak.

"Little Arthur is perfectly well. Look at him. His cheeks are bright and he is happier than he has been since the ship sailed."

"On the contrary, young woman——"

"Young woman, indeed!" exclaimed Nancy.

The idea of addressing her friend as "young woman." It made her blood boil!

"—the color in his cheeks is an unnatural flush caused by over-excitement. The person I speak of suffers from valvular heart trouble, and if the blood is pumped too fast, I could not answer for his life. Violent exercise is one of the things forbidden him, and it remains for a party of Americans to draw him into this dangerous and absurd game. I have charge of this boy and I forbid you to speak to him again. How do you feel, child? A little weak, here, eh?" he continued, placing his hand on the left side, over his heart.

"No, here," said Arthur irritably, placing his hand on the right side.

Telemac smiled.

"Evidently not heart trouble," he said.

"Shall I carry you to your stateroom, Arthur?" asked the doctor.

"If you please, doctor. I am sorry I can't play with you any longer, Telemac. I am very delicate, you know. I must be so careful. The doctors never let me run and romp."

The doctor lifted the child into his arms. The little face was quite pale and melancholy again, and as he waved with his thin, small hand a feeble good-by, he looked so ill and exhausted that the girls were almost convinced.

"Stuff and nonsense," exclaimed Telemac. "I should like to wring that ignorant fellow's neck for putting such ideas into the child's head! He's a dear little fellow, too."

"Think how I feel," cried Billie. "A murderess! My goodness!"

There was a bugle call for lunch, and the young people, whose spirits had been temporarily quenched by the sour-faced doctor, hastened into the dining-room.

CHAPTER IV.—AN EPISODE ON DECK.

"'A wet sheet and a flowing sea
And a wind that follows fast
And fills the white and rustling sail
And bends the gallant mast;
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While like the eagle free
Away the good ship flies and leaves
Old England on the lee.'"

So sang Feargus as he paced the deck one blustery, brilliant morning, two days before the ship reached port. Every little wave wore a whitecap on that beautiful day, and the sky only was bluer than the candid eyes of the young Irishman pacing the deck. Billie walked, or rather ran, beside him, her cheeks glowing with exercise, her fine brown hair tossed about by the breezes.

"Oh, it's a glorious life, Miss Billie," cried the young man. "The sea, the wonderful, splendid sea! I sometimes wish I were a deep-sea fisherman and could spend six weeks at a time out of sight of land in a smelly little sailing vessel."

"Why were you not a sailor, then?" demanded Billie, who clung to her father's theory that people should follow their own bent.

"I had always expected to go into the Navy," replied Feargus, "but it was impossible when the time came."

"Why impossible?"

"Well, you see, we lost our home. Irish people are awfully poor. What few chances we had were snatched away from us. We have been crushed! Oh, you can never know what bitterness I feel——" he clenched his fist and raised it to

heaven. "The home my people have been living in for hundreds of years,—the land we owned—or thought we owned——"

He broke off, unable to speak for the choking rage that clutched his throat. "When I am rich," he cried at last, "I shall get even. There will come a time when I shall be the man on top. It may take fifty years, but it will come."

Billie felt awed and silenced by this revengeful prophesy. The changes from fair to stormy weather which appeared with such suddenness in the young man's disposition almost frightened her.

"Do you think it will help any by filling your mind with hatred like that, Feargus?" she asked presently. "I should think it would only weaken your case and poison your whole nature."

"Weaken?" he cried. "It makes it stronger and me, too. I'm a perfect giant when I think of it. I shall bring down the skies on that man's head some day."

"What man?"

"The man that did it. The man that stole our home from us. He is a nobleman and I'm just a poor boy, but the time is coming when he'll beg to me for mercy."

Feargus' round, good-natured face had turned white. His dark hair was ruffled all over his head in wild confusion. His eyes had a bloodshot look and he waved his clinched fists dramatically above his head.

Billie was frightened. She felt as if she were speaking to an insane person; but then she had really never met any one with a grievance before, and Feargus O'Connor had a serious and deep grievance against some one.

"Come on," she said kindly. "Don't spoil your appetite for breakfast. You were singing when I came out. Start up again and maybe it will help you forget your troubles. How did it go?

"'A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
And a wind that follows fast—"

"You're awfully kind, Miss Billie," said the boy, waking into consciousness again, and feeling that he had been very rude to air his troubles to a comparative stranger. "Let's sing 'Come back to Erin, Mavourneen, Mavourneen.' That's my sister's favorite song. She sings it with the harp. You should hear her. It's beautiful."

They had just started on their promenade again, when they heard scampering footsteps behind them and a childish voice called:

"Please wait. I want to walk with you."

It was the pale little boy, Arthur, whose last name they had never learned, racing down the deck after them.

"Why, Arthur, where are the people who look after you?" demanded Billie. "I thought you were not allowed on deck alone."

"The doctor is having his bath and the others are still asleep. I dressed alone and came up. Isn't it fun? You'll look after me, won't you?"

"Of course," said Billie, "but aren't you disobeying orders? Won't the doctor be angry with you, and perhaps with us, too, for letting you stay on deck?"

"But I have on my reefer and cap," objected the boy in the tone of one who gives orders and expects them to be obeyed. "I shall not go down."

"Very well," said Billie, "if that is your decision, we are delighted to have your company, and I hope the walk will do you good. You look as if you needed fresh air and exercise more than anything else."

"The doctor says that draughts are bad for me and I am not strong enough to take exercise."

"What are you doing now but exercising in one of the finest draughts that ever blew over the sea, and it only brings the color to your cheeks," exclaimed Feargus impatiently. "Where are your parents, boy, that you are left to the care of old fogy doctors and careless tutors?"

"Papa is always very busy," answered the child. "Mamma died ever so many years ago."

"You blessed child," cried Billie, pressing little Arthur to her side, "you dear little boy. I'll be a big sister to you, if that will help any."

"I like you," said Arthur ingenuously, "and I like you, too," he added to Feargus. "You are the nicest one on the ship and they won't let me speak to you. They never will let me speak to the nicest ones."

"Not speak to me? And why not, pray?"

"Oh, they know about you," said Arthur, shaking his head mysteriously.

"There's nothing to know," exclaimed Feargus exasperated. "What do they know?"

"They know that your name is 'O'Connor."

"Well, what of that? It's a good name."

"I don't know," answered the boy, "but I like you and I wish you were my tutor,—just you and no one else. You would tell me stories, wouldn't you, Feargus?" he continued, pressing against the young man's side affectionately. "They will never tell me anything except about Latin and Greek. I want to hear about fairies and giants and elves. There's a fairy in our forest. I saw her once. She was only this big——" he held up his forefinger. "Just a tiny bit of a fairy, you know. She wore white and she had a silver star in her hair, and she had wings,"—his voice dropped mysteriously,—"butterfly wings."

"And did you really see her?" asked Billie gently.

"Oh, yes. Nurse saw her, too. I was quite small then and had a nurse. The

fairy's name was 'Lilli-Bullero.'"

"'Lilli-Bullero—bullen a la—
Lero-lero, Lilli-Bullero,
Lero-lero—bullen a la."

sang Feargus, with a gay laugh. "That's a song, Arthur, my boy. I'll teach it to you some day."

"But it's the name of my fairy, too," persisted Arthur. "She lives in Ireland and she chooses flowers for her homes. She came into the garden looking for a new house when we saw her. She flew from one flower to another, but she didn't stay."

The child was so inspired by his recollections of Lilli-Bullero, that he did not notice the wrathful figure of Dr. Benton hurrying down the deck. The old man had slipped on his overcoat over his dressing gown, and the skirts of these two voluminous garments, blown about by the scurrying wind, impeded his walk so that he hardly made any progress.

"Arthur, boy," he thundered, half-way down the deck.

Arthur looked up quickly, gave a wild elfin laugh at the spectacle of the old man trying to keep his bare legs covered from the cold, then broke away and ran as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

The doctor shook his fist at him.

"You young scamp! I shall report the matter to your father at once," he cried. "How dare you disobey me when you have strict orders to obey?"

Billie and Feargus leaned on the ship's rail and watched the scene. It was none of their affair and they had no intention of interfering.

"Horrid old man!" cried Arthur. "I hate you and I shall tell my father so. I will not obey you, so there!"

He darted down the deck, the old man after him, his coat tails flapping ludicrously, and they disappeared around the end of the ship.

The young people laughed gayly.

"What an old nuisance he is!" exclaimed Feargus.

"What a strange father Arthur must have!" said Billie at the same moment.

"Don't you think we'd better follow to see that no harm is done?" suggested Feargus, after a moment. "Old Crusty might take advantage of no one's being on deck to strike the little fellow, and, by Jove, I'd like to see him try it when I am there!"

They hurried down toward the stern, and turned the corner just in time to see something which made their blood turn cold.

Little Arthur, frightened, evidently, by the rage of his guardian, had

climbed over the rail and was standing on the outer edge of the deck holding to the balustrade with one hand and shaking his other fist angrily at the doctor, who was yelling hoarsely:

"Come back, you silly little fool! Idiot that you are, come back!"

Feargus ran swiftly up the deck followed by Billie.

"Don't speak to the boy like that or you'll have him overboard!" he exclaimed.

"Mind your own business! Get out of my way!" cried the excited man, wringing his hands frantically as he hurried along battling with the wind and his waving skirts.

Feargus, instead of following, turned and ran as fast as he could around the side of the ship and disappeared, leaving Billy in a state of anxious perplexity.

"Don't come near me," Arthur was calling. "If you come a step nearer, I shall jump."

This piece of paralyzing information made the doctor pause and consider.

"Do you want to kill yourself?" he yelled.

Arthur looked at him with a strange unchildlike expression.

"Father O'Toole told me that when I died I should see my mother," he said, "and I would rather be with her than with you. I often think of dying. I shall be able to do as I like then."

"But your father, your poor father, think how he would miss you, Arthur," put in Billie.

"I think papa would be glad. He doesn't love me. Nurse told me he didn't. He loves Max because he is the biggest and strongest and can ride horseback and shoot a rifle. He doesn't love me,—nobody loves me——"

The boy began to cry bitterly.

The doctor moved a step nearer.

"Don't come near me," shrieked the child. "I shall throw myself in the water if you move again."

"You had better leave him to us," said Billie in a low voice. "Don't call his attention to Feargus and I will try to keep him interested."

The doctor retreated. It was evident that he could do nothing and that the life of his charge lay in the hands of those two despised young people. In the meantime, Feargus had run swiftly all the way around the deck and was now creeping along outside the railing, hoping to reach the child without being noticed.

"Arthur, I love you, dear," called Billie, coming a step nearer, "and I shall be a big sister to you always. I know lots of fairy stories, too. Wouldn't you like to have me tell you about Queen Mab and all the fairies, how they danced every night in the moonlight in a circle on the lawn, and one night a big rabbit came

along and scared them away——"

Arthur laughed joyfully and almost lost his balance. Billie's heart stood still. Feargus had nearly reached him now, but what if the child should turn his head and see him creeping up behind! Such a strange passionate little fellow he was, filled with wild impulses and with bitterness, too. Might he not give the leap, as he threatened, just as Feargus stretched out his hand to grasp him?

"Arthur, if you keep perfectly still while I count ten," called Billie, "I will do anything in the world you ask. We will have a game of catcher, or hide and seek; or I'll tell you a beautiful story, or Feargus will sing you an Irish song——"

"Oh," interrupted the child in an ecstasy of pleasure which made Billie's heart fairly ache, "oh, will he? Goody, goody——" and with that he let go of the rail to clap his hands, and toppled over the side of the ship.

But Arthur was not destined to die that morning. Feargus, who reached him just as he fell, caught one of his small feet in a firm grasp and drew him back to the ledge. Then he lifted the unconscious child gently in his arms and gave him to Billie, who laid him on the deck.

Telemac Kalisch appeared just then, looking for his young Irish friend. He hurried up to the group, followed by the doctor, who was speechless with fright and mortification.

"He's all right," said Telemac, feeling Arthur's heart and wetting the child's lips from one of the small phials in the medicine case. "There, he's coming to already. You came near having a fine ducking, my boy, didn't you?" he exclaimed, smiling gravely into the little fellow's bewildered eyes.

"Then I'm not dead, after all?" asked Arthur.

"Dead, indeed! I should say not. You're as right as a trivet. Close your eyes now for a minute until you get more used to things."

Telemac stood up and looked the doctor squarely in the eye.

"Who is this poor, unhappy, neglected little soul?" he asked in a low voice.

"He is the second son of the Duke of Kilkenty," answered the doctor in a half-frightened voice.

"The Duke of Kilkenty?" gasped Feargus.

He exchanged a long glance with Telemac and then walked swiftly away, but Billie felt sure that it had been the Duke of Kilkenty who had driven the O'Connor family out of their ancestral holdings.

CHAPTER V.—LONDON AT

NIGHT.

It was quite dark when the train pulled into Paddington Station in London. It was raining, too, and the wet asphalt streets became mirrors underfoot, reflecting the myriad lights of the city. There was great confusion at the depot. Luggage must be identified and collected; steamer friends parted with and cabs engaged.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Miss Campbell, who had not been in London for twenty years, "I feel so lonesome all of a sudden in this crush. I do wish we had a man to help us."

The wish was no sooner uttered than it was granted by the kind and merciful providence who has a special tenderness for helpless, middle-aged spinsters.

Feargus O'Connor, the only one of their steamer friends whom they had missed on the way up to London,—chiefly because he had traveled third class and hidden himself away,—now approached.

"How may I help the ladies?" he asked.

"My dear Mr. O'Connor, you are as welcome as the flowers in spring," the little lady cried. "I am afraid to trust my girls out of my sight for a minute in this enormous city for fear they might be kidnapped, and I simply cannot face those luggage people myself."

"Let me be your guide, counsellor and friend, then," said Feargus. "First, let's get the luggage business straightened, and then I'll see you safe to your cab, or your hotel, if you wish."

"We are going into lodgings," cried the Motor Maids in unison.

It seemed to the four young girls at that time that life could not offer a more romantic experience than lodgings in London. The rooms had been engaged long ago, and the landlady notified from Liverpool to have the supper prepared and all things ready. It was to be a chapter out of Dickens. They did not mind the wet sheet of rain that blew in their faces, nor the glimmering mud puddles. The cries of the cab-men were music to their ears. A lonely little boy in the station reminded them of David Copperfield. The cockney accent was a strange new language to them, and the throngs of travelers in rough ulsters and fore-and-aft caps filled them with the most profound interest.

At last the luggage, collected and identified, was piled on top of a hackney coach and the bags stored inside with Miss Campbell, Elinor and Mary. Billie and Nancy were in a hansom waiting just behind.

"Thank you a thousand times; you're a nice boy," said Miss Campbell, giving her hand to Feargus. "I hope you'll come and see us while we are in London."

Feargus was about to reply when a splendid carriage with footman and coachman on the box slowly approached. Just as it came opposite the two cabs, a child's voice called:

"Feargus, Billie, please don't forget me," and little Arthur, leaning from the window, waved his cap at them. Inside were his three "keepers," as Billie called them, who took not the slightest notice of the Americans or the young Irishman.

"Good-by, Arthur, dear, I shall never forget you," cried Billie. "We shall meet again, some day."

Arthur leaned out of the window farther.

"Good-by, dear Billie," he called again, when some one pulled him roughly back on the seat, and the carriage disappeared in the darkness.

During this episode, Miss Campbell had called out the address to the coachman, who had flicked his horses sharply with his whip and they had started on. The hansom in which were Billie and Nancy was delayed a moment while the two girls said farewell to their steamer friend, who with a last wave of his hat was soon lost in the throng on the station platform. All this is very important, because of what happened later. In the meantime, the two girls settled back comfortably on the seat and clasped hands.

"Isn't it wonderful, Billie?" cried Nancy, as the cab rolled along the slippery street. "It is London, really London."

"And we are alone in London, too," continued Billie. "Isn't it like a play? Two young girls just arrived from another country suddenly find themselves alone, without friends or money, in a great city. It is night, and the rain is beating on the wet asphalt. In a great rumbling carriage crouch the two orphans, their hands clasped——"

"Wot h'address, Miss?" broke in a harsh voice.

The cab had stopped on a street corner and the coachman was leering at them through the trap door above.

"What address?" repeated Billie, bewildered.

"Certainly, Miss. Them was the words I used. Wot h'address? A'n't it an ord'nary question for a cabbie to awsk his fare?"

The two girls looked at each other speechless with amazement.

"But, weren't you told?" demanded Nancy, when she could collect her thoughts. "Didn't the lady in the other cab tell you?"

"Now, Miss, w'y need I be awskin' if I wuz told?"

"But why didn't you follow the other cab?" cried Billie.

"I wasn't told to, Miss. I wasn't told to do anythink but do as I was bid."

"Where were you going, then?" demanded Nancy, who was a sprightly young person when it came to cabbies and stewardesses.

"Ah, ma'am, now you've awsked me somethink I cawn't tell you. Not

havin' no address, how can I?"

"Idiot!" exclaimed Nancy under her breath. What could they do with this incorrigible man?

"Can't you even remember the street, Nancy?" whispered Billie.

They wrinkled their brows and sat in deep thought for a moment. Their young minds were like travelers on a dark road stumbling blindly through a host of misty names.

At last Nancy exclaimed triumphantly:

"I've got it! Miss Rivers."

"Do you happen to know of a Miss Rivers who has a lodging house, driver?" asked Billie, trying to appear calm and unafraid.

"No, Miss," answered the cabbie with a queer laugh; "Miss Rivers and I a'n't personally acquainted."

"What are we going to do, Billie?" whispered Nancy.

"Let's look in a city directory and see if we can't find Miss Rivers' Lodgings or Chambers or whatever it is," suggested Billie. "Drive us to a city directory, cabbie."

Once more the hansom started on its way.

"The worst of it is, Nancy," observed Billie, after an uneasy pause, "the most terrible part of it is, I haven't any money. I had given what I had to Cousin Helen on the ship to be changed with hers into English money, and I never got it back. I thought it would be time when we reached our lodgings."

"And I did the same thing," whispered Nancy. "I haven't a copper cent."

It was not long before the cab drew up at a pharmacy and the two girls jumped out. There were many "Rivers" in the city directory—"oceans of Rivers," as Nancy remarked. At last they settled on Mrs. Hannah Rivers, Beekman Terrace, and Miss Felicia Rivers, 14 Jetson Row.

"Does either one of those sound like the address to you, Nancy?" asked Billie.

"I don't know," replied the other wearily. "I've lost all sense of sound and memory. We might try Hannah, anyhow. She sounds hopeful."

Billie wrote the numbers down in her note book and gave the order curtly to the coachman, who winked one eye profoundly at the two young girls and gave a knowing smile.

"Beekman Terrace? H'it's a good w'ys from 'ere."

Billie was provoked.

"That's none of your affair," she said impatiently. "We don't ask you to do it without paying you. Only do hurry. If you had never been so slow, we shouldn't have got in this mess."

"I awn't no charioteer, Miss, and I awn't no four-in-'and driver with race-

'orses at me whip's-end. I awn't in the 'orse-killin' business, either. If h'I'm to drive fifteen miles, h'I'll tyke it at me own time."

"Fifteen miles?" repeated Billie in great uneasiness.

"Is that very far from Westminster Abbey?" asked Nancy innocently.

"H'it's a good distance, Miss."

"Well, we're very near to the Abbey, and I'm sure that can't be the place, then."

The cabbie roared out a great mirthful laugh.

"Where is this address?" demanded Billie, taking no notice of his amusement. "Miss Felicia Rivers, No. 14 Jetson Row?"

"That's a bit nearer."

"Go ahead, then," called Billie, feeling suddenly quite hopeful and happy. "I'm sure that's it, Nancy. It's bound to be. Our lodgings were so near to everything and it does seem to me the lodging house keeper's name was 'Felicia.'"

"She was a Miss, I'm certain," continued Nancy. "It comes back to me now, because I remember making a picture in my mind of a thin old maid who kept lodgers in her upper rooms, and had a cat and drank tea in the back parlor."

It seemed a long way, however, to the abode of Miss Felicia Rivers. Through a network of dark, roughly paved streets they drove slowly. They were very tired and hungry and the cold damp air seemed to penetrate through their heavy ulsters. At last they drew up in front of a shabby-looking old house with the usual basement and a curved flight of steps leading up to the front door, which was opened at the very moment the cab stopped, and a woman ran down to the sidewalk.

"You've been a long time gettin' here," she said. "The Missus was that uneasy."

"Will you ask my cousin to pay the cab bill?" Billie said. "We haven't any money."

"It was expected she'd pay the bill, Miss," said the maid, pulling a worn old purse from her apron pocket.

If Billie had not been so tired and bewildered, she would have felt some surprise at this rejoinder. However, the maid paid the cabbie, who cracked his whip and drove off in the darkness. Then the two young girls hastened up the curved flight of steps and plunged into a hall of utter blackness, followed by the maid, who closed the door with a rattling bang and led them into the parlor.

"Where is my cousin?" demanded Billie.

"She says you're to wyte. She'll be up in a jiffy."

With that the maid departed, and the two girls sat down much dejected in front of a tiny little grate filled with dead ashes of past fires. A dim light from one gas jet turned low cast great fantastic shadows on the wall, and a deadly quiet

pervaded the old house.

CHAPTER VI.—MISS FELICIA RIVERS.

They waited in gloomy silence for what seemed an age. Never in all their lives had they experienced such forlorn sensations as they felt in that shabby parlor. They listened with strained ears for sounds through the house. Down in some subterranean, cavernous place they could hear a voice, loud, shrill and scolding, and presently the maid returned bearing a gas-lighter, with which she turned the taper on to its full powers.

What a room that was, as revealed now by the light! It reminded the girls of a hospital for broken-down furniture:—rickety chairs and tables; pictures that hung crooked on the walls; a musty, dusty carpet. They took it all in with one frightened, comprehensive glance, and they knew that if Miss Campbell were there, it would only be for one night,—perhaps only for one hour.

"My cousin, where is she?" demanded Billie abruptly, feeling that something must be done at once. "Will you take me to her room, please?"

The maid, who, by the light of the gas, proved to be a wretched little object, down at the heel, shabby, with her cap awry and a smut across one cheek, turned on her fiercely.

"Your cousin, the Missus as is, is a-comin' when she gits ready to come *h'and* no sooner," she said, giving a fair imitation of Billie's manner and voice. "She awn't ready yet h'and I'd like to see her as would myke her come afore she is."

"But what is she doing?" demanded Nancy.

"She is a-eaten' of her supper, Miss, h'and she says when I tells her you wuz come: 'Tell 'em to wyte. Beggars awn't choosers,' says she. 'If I've got to look awfter them while they're in Lundon,' says she, 'I'll look awfter them in me own w'y, h'and if they're lyte, I'll be lyter,' she says, h'and no mistykes."

Billie's face flushed a brilliant scarlet.

"My cousin said that?" she said. She walked over and looked the girl squarely in the face. "How dare you repeat a message of that sort as coming

from my cousin? Take me to her instantly or I'll find her myself, if I have to look over the whole house from cellar to garret."

At these words of authority, the slavey wilted into a cringing, obsequious creature.

"I awsk your pardon, Miss," she whimpered. "An' I awsk you not to go and tell the Missus. She's that strict. I'm only a poor slyvey, Miss, an' work is poor paid for me and the lykes of me. I thowt you wuz different, Miss. 'Onest, I did."

"Just take us to my cousin, please, and never mind what you think," ordered Billie, too exasperated and anxious to feel any human pity for the miserable little slavey.

They followed her into a black passage leading Heaven knows where,—down into the bowels of the earth, the young girls believed for a moment; for they now descended a narrow flight of stairs so dark and narrow that they could touch the wall on each side. At last in the basement hall they perceived a glimmering light through a crack in a door which the slavey opened fearfully.

"Down't scowld, ma'am. Your relytion would come down. H'I couldn't help it. 'Onest I couldn't."

The two girls walked boldly into the circle of light and stood blinking their eyes after the darkness outside.

Before a fairly comfortable coal fire in a grate as absurdly small as the one in the room above, sat an enormous woman eating her supper from a little table drawn up beside her arm chair. The supper was comfortable, and the fragrance of hot buttered toast mingling with the appetizing fumes of bacon and sausage suddenly reminded the two forlorn young girls that they were ravenously hungry.

Too amazed to utter a word, they stood gaping at the strange woman, who appeared to show no surprise whatever.

"You're a nice pair of young women," she said sharply, "getting here at this hour when I expected you at six o'clock. I suppose you are hungry, too. Marty, make some more toast and another pot of tea. Sit down. As long as you're here, we might as well make the best of it. Draw up two chairs. I should never have recognized you, Eva. You used to look like your mother, but you have lost even those good looks. You are much too tall. The Smithsons and Rivers are all medium-sized——"

The girls looked at her pityingly. Medium-sized was hardly the word to use in connection with this gigantic female.

"But there is some mistake——" began Billie. "I am looking for my cousin——"

The woman groaned aloud.

"Don't you know your own cousin whose bread and butter you expect to

eat for the next six months and whose roof you expect to sleep under?"

"My cousin is Miss Helen Campbell," exclaimed Billie desperately. "We only arrived from America the other day. Didn't she engage lodgings from you and telegraph we were coming this evening?"

"What is this you're telling me?" cried the woman. "You mean to say you're not my two cousins, Eva and Laura Smithson? Who are you?" she demanded fiercely. "Where did you come from? Give me back the three shillings I paid for your cab fare, and a big price it was, too."

Her small pale eyes gleamed angrily at them and her enormous bulk fairly trembled with rage.

Billie explained that their cab had missed the one in front, and without any address they were lost.

"We thought we remembered the name of 'Rivers'," she continued, "and we got your address from the directory and came here. Now, what shall we do? We have no address, no money, nothing. If I could only let my cousin know to-night we were safe. She will be wild with anxiety."

"Do you think I believe your story?" cried the obstinate fat woman. "How can I tell you're speaking the truth? How do I know that you are not a pair of young spies, sent here by the police to pry into my secrets and the secrets of my lodgers,—not that we have any, but poor people are always suspected, while the rich go free. It's the poor that has the hard time in this wicked world, and the rich that flourishes, and it's the well-dressed ones with the innocent faces that's the most dangerous of all, and the most noticing,—not that there's anything to notice about my lodging house nor any secrets to hide. Everything is open and above board in this house, but I'm poor, and my lodgers is poor, and the police never lets the poor alone."

The fat woman paused breathless after this peroration and Nancy burst out indignantly:

"We are not spies. We are just two American girls lost in London."

"You won't regret being kind to us," put in Billie hotly. "When we get back to our friends, we shall be glad to pay you for your trouble."

The woman's pig eyes twinkled. She looked the two girls up and down, took in their neat traveling ulsters, their pretty hats. Even their trim boots came in for a share of notice, and their gloves and small handbags, minus a penny.

"Umph! Umph!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "So!"

In spite of themselves the girls could not help feeling terribly frightened. It was a scene of which they were reminded much later when they saw Hansel and Gretel and the old witch. Nancy's knees began to tremble violently.

But suddenly the temperature of Miss Felicia Rivers' manners took an unexpected rise.

"Come, dearies," she said, "take chairs, both of you. 'Are you weary, are you dreary, are you hungry, are you sad?' as the ballad says. Marty, some supper for these ladies. Now, dearies, a little tea and toast, just to please Felicia Rivers, and because you remind her of her own sweet little lamb cousins who are out in the rain somewhere to-night."

The girls sat down timidly and silently. Outside they could hear the rain beating against the walls of the old house.

Where was Miss Campbell? Would she arouse the whole of London in her search for her two lost girls? Oh, heavens, what a terrible thing it was to have neither money nor friends in the biggest city in the world! Billie made up her mind to one thing then and there. When she got back to Miss Helen Campbell—if ever she did get back—she intended to sew the largest piece of gold money in the English coinage in the lining of her coat for emergencies such as this; although she prayed heaven there would be no more such emergencies.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to call a policeman?" suggested Nancy, breaking the long silence which had fallen on them after Miss Felicia Rivers had hospitably invited them to sit down.

"Police!" screamed the enormous woman, giving her great bulk a violent shake, which made everything in the room rattle as if an earthquake had struck it. The mercury had dropped ten degrees. But it went up again in a hurry. "No, no, my dearies. A policeman would surely arrest you as suspicious characters. Take it from me, and leave the police alone. There's not one who would believe your story. No, what you need is a kind gentleman to advise you. Marty, go and tell Mr. Dinwiddie I wish to speak with him. Tell him there's tea brewing in the kitchen."

The girls exchanged a long meaning glance. Then Billie rose.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Rivers, but I think we won't wait to see your friend. We'd better be going. Perhaps a policeman can show us the way to—to——"

To where? Billie did not know herself. She choked down a sob and tried to think. Her father's teaching had covered many things, but he had never told her what to do when lost in a big city.

"When two young persons incurs debts which they can't pay, it awn't for them to say what they must and must not do. Young woman, take my advice and sit right where you are. No harm will come to you. Listen to the rain. Would you care to leave these beautiful rooms, every convenience, splendid location, candles and service, and go out on such a night as this? You'd be as mad as a March hare to do such a foolish thing. I'll keep you here to-night. There's an empty fourth-floor-middle. You can just as well put up there for to-night."

"You are very kind, but——" began Billie, when Marty, the slavey, hurried in, and behind her came a shabby middle-aged man, with a weak, delicate face,

pale watery eyes and an ingratiating smile. There was something of the dandy in his appearance at second glance, and if the light had been less bright, he might have looked really well-dressed. But his black and white checked trousers were fringed around the hems; his black cutaway coat was shiny and rubbed in the seams; his shoes down at the heels and his white gaiters soiled and spotted.

"Your servant, ladies," he said, making a low bow and placing his hand on his heart.

For some reason, the two girls felt more confidence in this shabby old dandy than in Miss Felicia Rivers. The amiability of his smile and a certain kindly gleam in his pale eyes made them more hopeful.

The lodging-house keeper explained the situation so rapidly and glibly that the young girls were startled by her sudden alertness.

"Now, Mr. Dinwiddie, what's to be done? I've paid their cab fare and I now offer to give them supper and lodgings. A'n't that 'ospitality? And do you think they accept the invitation? Not they!"

Mr. Dinwiddie glanced at a clock on the mantel.

"It's past eleven," he said. "I think you had better do as the lady says. You'll be safer here than you would be, lost out there in the storm, and we'll turn in and find your friends in the morning."

Past eleven o'clock! Who would have believed that all those hours had passed since they parted with their beloved friends at the station?

"We will stay, then," said Billie, sighing miserably. "But we wish you would have helped us find our friends to-night."

"We are willing to do w'ot we can, young woman," said Miss Felicia Rivers emphatically. "But we awn't willing to take the influenzy and the pneumonia for the sake of a pair of foolish girls who goes and gits lost."

They tried to swallow down a cup of tea and eat a bit of toast, but they were too wretched and uneasy to feel the pangs of hunger now; and it was almost a relief presently to follow the slavey, carrying a lighted candle, to the upper regions of the house, preceded by the vast bulk of Miss Felicia Rivers.

The stairs leading to the upper floors were not carpeted and their footsteps resounded on the bare boards with a dismal hollow sound.

The fourth-floor-middle was not such a miserable place, however, as they had expected. In the dimness of one flickering candle they could see that it was fairly well furnished with a big double bed, a rickety chest of drawers, a table and two chairs.

"Good night, my dears, sleep well," said Miss Felicia Rivers. "You won't be sorry in the morning that you accepted Felicia Rivers' 'ospitality."

Then the great creature removed herself into the hall and Billie quickly locked and bolted the door. There was another door in the room already locked,

but from which side it was impossible to say. At any rate there was no key in the keyhole. After taking the precaution to look through, and seeing nothing whatever, Billie went over and placed her hands on Nancy's shoulders.

"Nancy, dear, I have decided not to be frightened," she exclaimed. "It will only make matters worse for us to go off so. I know I've been just as terrified as you, but, after all, what else could the woman do? She couldn't turn us into the rain at this hour and she couldn't go herself. I am afraid Cousin Helen will have an awful night, but I really think the only thing for us to do is to go to bed and try to get a little rest."

"I don't see how we can sleep," said Nancy. "How do we know whether the sheets are clean?"

They examined the linen. It appeared perfectly fresh, and in their extreme weariness the bed indeed looked almost comfortable. At the end of another ten minutes they had crawled wearily under the strange covers, having removed only their shoes and dresses. What few pieces of jewelry they had, they had tied into a handkerchief and put under Billie's pillow. At last, worn out with their strange adventures, they fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER VII.—THE ESCAPE.

It was dawn when the two girls waked, a cold, gray dawn. Through the half-opened window a wet fog poured into the room. Even without the burden of uneasiness on their souls, they would not have felt cheerful at the prospect; and now, leaning on one elbow, Billie, who was the first to come back to consciousness, stared at the shabby place incredulously. Was it a bad dream? Where were they? Then memory returned and she jumped down to the floor. In the night, fears and suspicions had crowded into her mind, and she was determined to get away from this terrible Miss Rivers and her lodging house the instant daylight appeared. As soon as they could find their friends, Miss Rivers should be paid. In the meantime, they must escape. All these thoughts flew through Billie's mind while she drew on her shoes.

"Nancy," she said, in a low distinct voice, "get up. We must dress and escape from this house before that awful woman is awake."

Nancy opened her eyes sleepily.

"Where? What?" she began. "Why, Billie, what is the matter? Are you ill?" She sat up quickly, suddenly noticing that her friend's face had turned perfectly white.

"Nancy!" gasped Billie. "Oh, Nancy! Nancy!"

"For heaven's sake, what is it, Billie?" cried the other, reduced to an irritability from nervousness and fear, which was most unusual with her.

"Our clothes, Nancy, our dresses and coats and hats,—they are gone," gasped Billie, "and these are left in their places."

She held up two old, black, bedraggled skirts, one with an immense brown patch on the front and the other with a jagged tear.

"Nancy, we are among thieves. We must get away as fast as we can. In the name of goodness, get out of that bed and hurry up."

With that, Billie stepped into the old garment and pinned it around her waist.

Nancy did not need another warning; in two minutes she stood before her friend, the very picture of a beggar girl. Even in her misery, Billie could not keep from smiling faintly at the sight of Nancy Brown, always so neatly and coquettishly dressed, in this strange attire.

"Thank heavens, they left us our pumps," whispered the young girl, slipping on her shoes with a feeling of relief.

"Take them off and carry them," whispered Billie. "We don't want to make a sound. By the way, what time is it?"

She slipped her hand under her pillow for her watch. It was gone with their brooches and a locket of Nancy's which they had tied in the handkerchief.

"I might have known that woman was a thief," she whispered, "with those fishy, shifting little eyes. Come on quickly. The sooner we get out of here, the better."

Carrying their shoes in their hands, they tripped cautiously into the hallway. In all the house there was not a sound, and the creaking of their door as they closed it seemed to their excited nerves as loud as the report of a pistol. But they safely cleared one flight of stairs and paused, startled by a long ray of light streaming into the dark hallway through the keyhole of a door leading to a front bedroom. They had just time to crouch in the shadow of the landing when the door was opened quickly and the figure of a man stood silhouetted on the sill.

"Tweedledum is the next, is he?" said a voice within.

"Yes," answered the man in the doorway.

"Who's the man?"

"O'Connor, of course. He'll not be sorry."

"But he's a little young. Has he been told?"

"He will be, soon."

"Good night, or rather good morning. It's been an all-night affair," said the voice inside.

"Good day," said the other, and whistling softly, his hands thrust into his pockets, he strolled down the steps of the lodging house without noticing two dark figures pressed against the wall in the shadow of the landing. They waited until they heard the door slam, and then started once more on their journey downstairs. The conversation they had overheard was hardly intelligible to them, except for the name O'Connor. But of course there were thousands of O'Connors in the world. Nevertheless Billie stored that interview away in her mind. For some reason she could not forget it, and the words began, subconsciously, to take a meaning deeper than she knew. To Nancy they meant nothing at all, and she forgot them in the advent of more important matters.

One more flight of steps and they stood on the second floor. As they reached the landing, a bell in a neighboring tower clanged out the hour. It was five o'clock. They must lose no time. The occupants of a poor lodging house might be stirring in another half hour if not sooner.

In the room by which the two girls were passing at that moment, there was a sound of hurried footsteps. The door opened slightly and a querulous voice called:

"Do hurry. You are always slower when you know I'm suffering. I don't know what I ever did to have such a plain, ungrateful child!"

Involuntarily, the girls paused and listened. Only a few days ago, had they not heard that same querulous voice?

"Oh, yes," they could remember its saying, "I always stay at the very best places and go with the very best people. Dear Marie-Jeanne is like her mother. She only cares for aristocratic society."

But was it possible, in this den of thieves? The door opened wider. Some one in a long cape appeared and a girl's voice said:

"Do be quiet, mother, I'm going as fast as I can."

Closing the door with an impatient bang, Marie-Jeanne stepped into view. She was about to pass by the two beggar girls who faced her in the half-darkness. There were many strange people in this house. She never inquired into their business and they never inquired into hers. It was the etiquette of the place. Poor Marie-Jeanne had no curiosity about the other lodgers. She was only thankful that the house was quiet, for whatever schemes were hatched or secrets hidden in Miss Felicia Rivers' abode, it was done without noise. Marie-Jeanne, therefore, without turning one curious glance at the poor beggar maids, was hurrying past when Billie seized her arm.

"Don't cry out, Marie-Jeanne," she whispered, "but help us."

"I have no money. I am almost as poor as you. Don't stop me, please. I'm in a hurry."

"Marie-Jeanne, don't you know us?" whispered Nancy.

The young girl stared into their faces with wide-eyed amazement.

"Billie! Nancy!" she gasped. "Am I dreaming?"

"No," answered Billie. "I wish you were. We've had a dreadful time, Marie-Jeanne. Let us go out of this place first, before that woman wakes up."

"What woman?"

"Miss Felicia Rivers."

Marie-Jeanne started.

"I'm very much afraid of her," she said. "So is mother."

The three girls crept down the last flight of steps and out into the foggy morning. But not until they had reached the nearest pharmacy did Billie and Nancy tell the tale of their adventures to their friend.

"But why did you choose Miss Felicia Rivers of all names?" she demanded, when they had finished.

"Because it sounded like the name of a woman. Cousin Helen had written to for lodgings."

"Good heavens," exclaimed Marie-Jeanne, "what poor memories you have! It wasn't Felicia Rivers. It was Letitia Lake."

Letitia Lake! What tricks one's memories play! While the sleepy all-night drug clerk filled the prescription, they looked up Miss Letitia Lake in the directory. There it was, staring them in the face, and instantly that name and address were so indelibly graven on their memories that neither Billie nor Nancy will forget it to her dying day.

"How are we to get there, now we do know the address?" demanded Nancy. "We don't know the way."

"We must go in a cab," said Billie firmly.

"Do you think two beggar girls could hire a cab?"

"No, this is what you must do," put in Marie-Jeanne, who had gained wisdom by experience and suffering. "One of you can wear this long cape of mine and the other can have mother's. It's exactly like this one. I will lend you what money I have,"—she paused and flushed hotly,—"if you don't mind my calling very soon to get it back, and the capes, too. Mother always has a spell when we get into these places where we live on almost nothing, but the spells never last long, and she may ask for her cape and the money, too."

"You are the kindest friend in the world, Marie-Jeanne," exclaimed Billie warmly, "and I hope we can do something for you some day to show you how much we appreciate it."

Marie-Jeanne smiled with pleasure.

"I must hurry in now," she said shyly. "Mother, when she wants this medicine and hasn't got it, is nearly wild."

"We will wait for you here, then," said Billie.

Nothing could induce them to enter that awful lodging house again, and the two girls stood shivering in the wet mist while Marie-Jeanne hastened away on her errand. The streets were not empty now. Occasionally a workman passed with a tin pail on his arm; or a tired, battered old creature whom the girls guessed to be a charwoman. Nobody even glanced at them in their ragged dresses except a little boy with an old face, who called out:

"Beggars is out early this morning."

In five minutes Marie-Jeanne returned with the two capes and the money.

"You got out just in time," she said. "I met Miss Rivers in the hall as I came away. She was going upstairs as fast as she could carry her big body, no doubt to look into your room and see how you stood the loss of your belongings."

"What would she have done to us if she had found us there?" asked Nancy.

"There is no telling. She might have turned you out of the house and denounced you, or she might have been very sweet and sympathizing. But she would have got out of it in some way."

"Marie-Jeanne, I wish we could take you out of all this," cried Billie impetuously. "Must you stay in this dreadful place?"

Marie-Jeanne's eyes filled with tears.

"It isn't only poverty that's keeping us here. There is something else. I can't tell you,—but you must promise me, if you can stand the loss of your things, not to send the police here. That is the only thing I ask, because if they came,—the police——" she paused and burst into tears.

"Dear Marie-Jeanne, isn't there any thing we can do?" they asked, but not another word would the poor girl say. And presently she drew away from the two girls and hailed a belated hansom. They kissed her good-by, but she still refused to speak, and giving the address of Miss Letitia Lake as glibly as if they had known it all their lives, they jumped into the cab and drove away.

As they turned the corner a sign over a little shop caught their eye. It read:

THOMAS DINWIDDIE,
DEALER IN CAST-OFF CLOTHING.

In three-quarters of an hour the hansom paused in front of a fashionable-looking house in a quiet, respectable street, and in another three minutes Nancy and Billie were laughing and weeping in the arms of their friends, while some one in the next room was telephoning to the police station that the two American girls who had been lost were found at last.

CHAPTER VIII.—WESTMINSTER CHAMBERS.

Oh, the joy that cometh in the morning after a night of weeping!

Billie had always prided herself on her optimism, but that night in Miss Felicia Rivers' lodging house had quenched it for a time. The two girls cried and laughed by turns in telling the story of their sufferings to their friends, who were almost as bedraggled and forlorn as they were themselves. Miss Campbell and her two remaining charges had not touched the bed that terrible night. They had been in active communication with the police department and the American Embassy since eight o'clock the evening before.

"We can afford to laugh now that all's said and done," exclaimed Nancy; "but if I had been compelled to wear those rags five minutes longer, I am certain I should have jumped off London Bridge."

"Of course you would, you dressy little person," said Billie. "I didn't care for the feel of them myself, and I don't mind how soon I get a bath and a shampoo now I've got rid of them; but it was almost interesting, being disguised as a beggar. If I had had half a chance, I should have held out my hand for pennies, just to see how profitable the begging business is."

"Well, you've given us a dreadful time, my dear," sighed Miss Helen Campbell; "but I've only myself to blame. I am a poor guardian, I am afraid, driving off that way and leaving you two inexperienced children alone."

"No, dearest cousin, it was your cabman's fault. He went too fast for us to follow him."

"I think it was our cabman's fault," said Nancy, "for not listening to the address."

"It was my fault, really, for not getting the address," cried Billie.

But who shall say where the blame lay in an incident so strange and unaccountable? Perhaps it lay on the shoulders of Providence herself who had made Billie and Nancy her unconscious tools in the great game of fate. By that night of loneliness and terror, their destinies had become linked with the destinies of

other persons, and without knowing it, they had learned a powerful secret.

"We are minus two cloth skirts, two polo coats, two hats, a watch, two pins and a locket; one coral silk tie and one blue silk tie," announced Nancy, counting off their stolen possessions on her fingers.

"Is Miss Felicia Rivers to be arrested?" demanded Mary Price.

"Likewise Mr. Thomas Dinwiddie, Dealer in Old Clothes?" put in Elinor Butler.

"They should be in jail this minute, the villains!" cried Miss Campbell.

"But," began Nancy, "we promised——"

"We promised?" repeated the others.

"Yes. To Marie-Jeanne. Don't ask what her reasons were, because we don't know. But she made us promise that if she helped us we would not set the police on Miss Felicia Rivers."

"Poor child! Poor young girl!" exclaimed Miss Campbell. "There is surely something back of it all. Her mother is a strange woman, but of course you must keep your word."

Just then the telephone bell rang.

"That's the Police Department now," she continued. "I will answer it myself. Hello! Yes! This is Miss Campbell. Yes, they are safe with me now. They went to the wrong lodging house. It was all a mistake. No, a friend met them by chance and saved them. No complaints. Thank you for your courtesy."

And so it happened that Miss Felicia Rivers and her friend, Thomas Dinwiddie, Dealer in Old Clothes, were not visited by justice at that time for their sins past or present.

The abode of Miss Letitia Lake was not called a lodging house at all, but by the much more high-sounding and finer title of "Westminster Chambers." It had a perfect right to its name, for it was quite near to Westminster Abbey, whose twin towers might be seen from the windows of the upper chambers. It was a dignified, stately old house, once the home of a gentleman of title they were told, and was built of red brick, turned pink with age. A mantle of ivy clung to its walls, the growth of a century, perhaps, and the windows of the Campbell apartment looked out on an old garden already green with the touch of spring. There were three bedrooms of vast size furnished with fine old mahogany and faded hangings of another century, and a charming sitting room with long French windows opening upon little balconies over the street. The furniture in this room was modern; deep wicker chairs with bright chintz cushions were clustered around a fire of soft coals. Chintz curtains were at the windows and a dark red rug on the floor. The ceilings were very high, and the window recesses so deep that the girls wondered if the house had not been built to withstand shot and shell with those thick, solid walls.

It was in this room that the five kimonoed and slippered travelers assembled after hot baths of a refreshing and reanimating character.

The daintiest little red-cheeked maid brought in a tray much larger than she was, and deposited it on the center-table. The quaint old Canton china, the linen as white as snow, the fragrance of the most delicious tea ever tasted,—this soothed their senses; while toast, hot-buttered, just off the toaster, eggs hiding under a napkin, breakfast bacon, crisp and fragrant, and orange marmalade in a jar with a Scotch plaid pattern,—this was the breakfast which these five ladies, weary to the point of being a little light in the head, now proceeded to make away with to the last crumb.

Then they drew up to the fire and toasted their toes on the brass fender.

"There is plenty of time. The whole summer is before us," said Miss Campbell sleepily. "We have weeks and weeks in which to see Westminster Abbey and London Tower and Windsor Palace and all the other sights. We shall take a good long rest to-day. I still feel myself rolling and pitching on that horrid old ship. After you have had your sleep and feel quite rested and strong again, you may put on your best evening dresses and——"

The little lady paused and blinked her eyes mysteriously.

"And what, dearest Cousin?" cried Billie.

"Oh, do tell us, Miss Campbell," exclaimed the others.

"Tell you what, my dears?"

"Why are we to put on our best evening dresses?"

"Don't you like to dress up?" she asked mischievously.

"Of course," exclaimed Nancy.

"Cousin Helen, you're a naughty little tease," cried Billie. "You have been keeping a secret from us all this long time."

Miss Campbell's peach-blossom face became inscrutable and her deep blue eyes widened innocently.

"Is there going to be a surprise?" asked little Mary in her sweet high voice.

"Is that what the note was that came not long ago?" demanded Elinor.

"I knew you had something on your mind," put in Billie. "I can always tell."

"It must be a perfectly delightful secret," observed Nancy, "because we are to wear our best clothes."

"But what is it?" they demanded, dancing around the charming little woman in an ecstasy of curiosity.

"If I told you, my dears, you wouldn't get a wink of sleep for excitement."

"But we are just as excited from not knowing," cried Billie.

"Perhaps it's tickets to the opera," guessed Elinor, her thoughts always on music.

"It must be a dinner party," said Nancy.

"Or a theater party."

"We are not going to meet the Queen?" asked Mary innocently.

This was too much for the gravity of the other girls and for Miss Campbell, too, who loved a good laugh, and the room was filled with merriment.

"No, dear, we're not going to meet the Queen, at least not yet," said Miss Campbell, kissing Mary's quiet, gentle face.

"Is it to be a party?"

"Of course. Else why wear your very best frocks?"

"But a big party?"

"No, a small one."

"Is it to be here?"

"I shall not say," said Miss Campbell firmly. "I shall not say another word."

"Then we are really not to know?" they cried desperately.

"No, you are to sleep for a long time, and do as I say. I have given my promise and I shall say no more."

And off sped Billie's tantalizing relation to her own room, the silk draperies of her negligee sweeping after her in lavender billows.

"I'll only tell you this much," she added, when she reached the door. "It's the very nicest surprise you could possibly imagine, and there is not one person here who will be disappointed. Now, off to your beds, every one of you."

She closed the door softly, leaving the four Motor Maids in a state of excited perplexity which no amount of discussion and conjecture could satisfy.

At length, feeling a great need for sleep, they obediently retired to their rooms and their beds.

The sun had broken through the mist and was shining brightly when Billie and Nancy awoke. There were spring noises in the street, the sound of distant music and the call of a flower vendor who was selling pots of rose geraniums and pansies. Billie opened her window and looked down into the garden below. How sweet the air was and how fresh and lovely the whole world! Already yesterday's experience had faded into a strange, unreal dream.

"Listen," whispered Nancy, "there is music in the room below."

Through the open window there floated to them the sound of piano playing; first a few introductory chords on the piano and then, to a running, delicious accompaniment, a lovely soprano voice began singing. They climbed back into the great four-post bed and curled up under the covers, and presently the words of the song were inextricably mixed with their dreams. This was the song that floated up to them:

"Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown.

Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the roses blown.

"There has fallen a splendid tear
From the passion flower at the gate.
She is coming, my love, my dear;
She is coming, my life, my fate.
The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near';
The white rose weeps, 'She is late';
The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear';
And the lily whispers, 'I wait'."

CHAPTER IX.—THE SURPRISE.

It was seven o'clock and they were all dressed and waiting for the surprise. For some reason they had had an idea it might come walking on two legs up the street or else riding in a hansom cab, and the four young girls had stepped onto the balcony outside their window. An occasional passer-by in that quiet quarter looked up with admiration at those four bright, eager faces watching each newcomer below. Their dainty muslin frocks gleamed softly white against the pink brick walls of the old house. Miss Campbell in a beautiful blue marquisette stood just inside the window with a mysterious little smile on her face.

The young girls did not hear the light tap on the door nor notice that she had turned to open it.

"Come in," she whispered. "I haven't told them yet, although it was really very hard to resist their pleadings."

A woman tiptoed into the room. She was tall and dark and very beautiful, so beautiful that Miss Campbell blinked her eyes for a moment as if she had been looking at the sun. The visitor's arms were filled with flowers.

"I have brought you each a bouquet," she whispered. "I remembered, Miss

Campbell, that you always loved forget-me-nots, and they will just match your dress to-night. Will you wear these for me?"

Miss Campbell's exclamation of pleasure drew the attention of the watchers on the balcony to the visitor. They peeped shyly in through the window. Here was the surprise at last! A vision in a beautiful white dress, her arms filled with violets and roses! But who was she?

"Have you really forgotten me?" she cried, putting the flowers on the table and stretching out her hands.

They waited for one brief, embarrassed moment. Then Nancy cried joyfully, "Mrs. Cortinas!"

"Not 'Mrs.'—'Maria,'" corrected the beautiful young woman. "Maria Ruggles Cortinas. Now, do you know?"

It was indeed Maria Cortinas, whose box of jewels Billie and Nancy had once so faithfully guarded.

Those of you who have read the first of these stories, entitled "The Motor Maids' School Days," will recall the adventures that befell the four young girls after they came into possession of that mysterious package. You will remember, too, Maria's mother, the wonderful old Spanish woman, Mrs. Ruggles, who kept the sailors' inn on the shore. Maria was not only gifted with beauty. She possessed a splendid voice and was now an opera singer of much renown in Europe. But not Billie herself could have been more modest than was this fortunate young woman.

"Maria Cortinas!" they cried, enchanted with her graciousness and beauty.

"May I not kiss you all around?" she said, proceeding to do so and leaving a bouquet in the hand of each young girl as she embraced her warmly.

"How good it is to see you again," she said, "and how sweet to hear the voices of my own home people. Oh, but I am lonesome for West Haven sometimes, and for my old home. I never seem to remember that South America ever existed."

"And your mother?" asked Billie.

"Dear mother can hardly wait to see you," she answered. "I am homesick sometimes, but she is homesick always. Sometimes I try to make her go back and open her inn again and cook. You know she always loved to cook."

It seemed very fine to the girls and Miss Campbell, too, that Maria Cortinas was not ashamed that her mother had cooked many a big dinner for West Haven picnic parties which drove down to the inn. Would they ever forget that wonderful dinner they had eaten at the old inn during the famous Hallowe'en house party at the St. Clairs'?

"But where is your mother?" asked Nancy.

"She has been laid up with rheumatism for weeks. The London climate

doesn't seem to agree with her, but she will stay here while I am singing."

"Are you singing in London?" they cried.

"In grand opera at Covent Garden," put in Miss Campbell solemnly.

"A grand opera singer?"

Maria Ruggles Cortinas actually blushed like a schoolgirl before their wondering faces.

"I hope you will forgive me," she laughed.

Elinor took her hand and looked reverently into her face.

"I have always wanted to know a grand opera singer," she said. "I always thought it would be like knowing a goddess. They seem so far above everything, so big——"

"They are certainly big, dear," laughed Maria, kissing her.

"And are we to hear you sing to-night?" asked Mary.

"No, not to-night. Some of the others. I never sing two nights in succession. That is why I could not join in the search for you last night. I was singing, and I knew nothing about what had happened until I got home and mother told me."

"Do you live here, too?" asked Billie.

"Yes. Mother loves this old house and I do, too. It's so much more private and quiet than a hotel. We have been coming here for years."

"And it was you who was singing this morning?" demanded Nancy.

"Very likely. I am always singing."

So it turned out that Maria Ruggles Cortinas, who had sung "Aïda" before a brilliant audience the night before, was the near neighbor of the Motor Maids, and was entertaining them at dinner that very evening.

"Shall we sit down and wait here until the motor comes?" suggested Maria. "It's not quite time yet. I told them to call at half past seven. People dine very late here."

The girls drew their chairs in a circle about the singer and watched her as if she were a curiosity. Certainly she was not their idea of what an actress was like. She was tall and quite slender through the hips, but with a singer's chest splendidly developed and a throat full and white like a column. Her black hair was arranged as plainly as possible in a low roll on the back of her neck. Her eyes were large and dark, her nose straight and well shaped; her mouth rather large, with a generous curve to the lips; her chin full and rounded. But it was not only her features that made Maria beautiful. There was something else, a certain graciousness and charm of manner, a lovely smile which radiated her face,—these things alone would have made almost any one beautiful. So Billie was thinking, when the motor car was announced.

Presently they found themselves rolling through the streets of London in a big touring car, in the late twilight which lingers in England long after the sun has

set. They became part of a stream of carriages and motor cars filled with people in evening clothes. The whole world of London seemed to have dressed itself up for dinner. At last they drew up in front of a great hotel. A lackey opened the door of the car and they followed Maria into a splendid restaurant where all the women were dressed in décolleté gowns and the men in evening clothes.

It was a brilliant scene to the young girls, the flowers and music and the soft-footed waiters gliding about. Miss Campbell and Maria exchanged smiling glances over their serious faces. An obsequious head waiter, who evidently knew Maria well, bowed them to a table as if they had been six royal princesses. Not one of our Motor Maids was free from a slight feeling of stage fright. But in a few moments they were eating their soup and talking as gayly and naturally as they ever had around Mrs. Ruggles' own table in the Sailor's Inn near West Haven.

"Are there any Lords and Ladies here, Maria?" asked Nancy.

"Lots of them," said the singer, smiling. "The room is full of them. And there's a Russian Prince over at that table," she added, indicating a slender young man with a high pompadour and such brilliant black eyes that they gleamed like coals of fire as he glanced about.

All the party, even Miss Helen Campbell, craned their necks to see the Russian prince.

"Girls," exclaimed Mary suddenly, startling them by her unusual vehemence, "look, girls, the man with the Prince! Would you ever have known him in the world in those clothes?"

Sitting at the table with the Russian was a man strangely familiar and yet unfamiliar to Miss Campbell and the Motor Maids. He was very old, quite small and dressed in the most correct evening clothes. He had a large shaggy head set on rather a small, delicate body.

"Mr. Kalisch!" they exclaimed, loud enough for Telemac himself to hear them across the room. He turned his head in their direction, recognized them instantly and hurried over to their table.

"It is good to see you again," he exclaimed cordially, shaking hands with each one, and giving Maria a low foreign bow. "I have been lonely for my young friends since I reached London. But I am always sorry when a journey is over. It's like reaching the end of a good book."

"Our journey has just commenced to be over," began Billie. "You didn't know that we were lost, Nancy and I, and spent the night at Miss Felicia Rivers' in the slums?"

Telemac's face suddenly turned perfectly crimson. Then the color faded as quickly as it had come. It was only for the mere fraction of an instant, but to Billie he appeared like a man who had received a shock, when he said slowly:

"You spent the night where?"

"At Miss Felicia Rivers' lodging house," repeated Billie.

Then, with Nancy's assistance, she related the history of their adventures.

"And you got safely away?" said Telemac.

"Yes," they answered, mindful of their promise to Marie-Jeanne.

"What an experience for two young girls just arrived in London!" he exclaimed. "And you saw nothing, heard nothing while you were there?"

"Yes, we saw and heard things, too," replied Nancy, "but nothing of importance."

"What time was it when you escaped?" he asked.

"Oh, somewhere between four and five o'clock."

"Did you ever hear of Miss Rivers' Lodging House, Mr. Kalisch?" asked Billie.

"How can I tell?" he answered. "London is full of such black holes as that."

But Billie in her heart had a conviction that Telemac knew Miss Felicia Rivers' lodging house very well. She couldn't explain why the thought had come to her or what difference it made if the strange man was acquainted with the wretched place; but she felt that he did not wish to appear to know it.

"How did you finally find your way back?" he asked.

"Marie——" began Nancy, and then stopped. If Marie-Jeanne had only not bound them over to secrecy! It was so difficult to tell the story and leave out the most interesting half.

"Another lodger, a girl, helped us," said Billie.

Telemac left them, promising to call at Westminster Chambers in a few days, and presently they finished dinner and with many other diners rolled away in motor cars to the opera.

"I feel like a real society belle," said Nancy, bridling with pride.

"I feel like a princess," observed Elinor.

"Of course you do, Lady Clara Vere de Vere," put in Billie.

"After we get into our box," began Maria, "perhaps,—in the first intermission, you may,—I'm not at all certain, mind you, but you may meet a real live lord. How would you like that?"

"A lord!" they repeated.

"Yes, he is a friend of mine and he often comes into my box on nights when I go to the opera to hear other people sing."

"Is he handsome?" demanded Nancy.

"Very, I think."

"Does he own a palace?" asked Mary.

"No, not a palace," answered Maria smiling. "He's counted poor as the world goes here, I believe. But he has an old place in Ireland somewhere he's very proud of. However, his title and his ruined castle are only a small part of

him. He is really a very fine man. He has asked me to visit his place in Ireland, and I do hope he will come to the box to-night, because I have concocted a wonderful scheme; and if it turns out as I wish, it will concern all of you. But here we are at the theater."

The four girls were not very intimate with grand opera. On one memorable occasion a company of great singers had given one performance in West Haven. "Lohengrin" was the opera, and as luck would have it, "Lohengrin" was the opera to-night. Many people smiled up at their eager faces looking down from the box, half awed, half bewildered at the brilliant audience. Miss Campbell and Maria sat in the back talking together.

It was very much like a dream:—tier after tier of private boxes were filled with parties of men and women, all very handsome and very beautifully dressed; the air hummed with conversation, like a bee-hive; from the pit, which seemed a great distance away, an occasional laugh floated up through the haze of talk; and through all sounded the noise of many instruments "tuning up."

Suddenly a slender, nervous-looking man emerged from somewhere underneath the stage and walked over to the leader's stand in front of the orchestra. Immediately the entire audience burst into applause. The leader bowed, seized his bâton, the lights went down, a hush fell over the place, and the overture began.

"The leader's bâton has a light in it like a fairy's wand," exclaimed Mary, forgetting where she was.

Maria smiled and touched the young girl's cheek lightly with one finger.

"Lots of people think it is a fairy's wand," she whispered.

How the music throbbed and thrilled! It went up and up in a great crescendo. Elinor shivered and closed her eyes. When she opened them again the curtain was slowly rising. As the opera proceeded she was lost to the audience, lost to her friends, to everything except the story of Elsa of Brabant.

Nancy listened to the music, but her eyes were busy, also, looking at the beautiful dresses of the ladies in the boxes adjoining.

"Last night," Billie was thinking, "we were two beggar girls dressed in rags, and to-night we are sitting in a box at the grand opera. I can hardly believe I am not dreaming."

As for little Mary, she had but one thought. With all her heart and soul she was waiting for Lohengrin, the Silver Knight, who would presently appear in his swan boat, far down the winding stream. At last the curtain went down. There was a movement, a stir, a burst of conversation and laughter, and she heard Maria saying:

"Lord Glenarm, let me introduce you to my young friends from home."

The four girls turned around quickly. It almost seemed to them that Lo-

hengrin himself must have made a rapid change from his silver armor to evening clothes and walked into their box. But on second glance, they saw that Lord Glenarm was older than the stage Lohengrin and much finer looking, too. His brown hair was slightly gray at the temples; his gray eyes had blue lights in them; he had rather a beaked nose and a fine, square chin. He was very tall, and his shoulders stooped a little. The girls could not tell why he reminded them at first of the tall blonde young Lohengrin. Perhaps it was a certain seriousness in his face and strength of purpose.

"It is a great pleasure always to meet young ladies from America," said Lord Glenarm, shaking hands with each of the Motor Maids, as Maria spoke their names. He had been presented to Miss Campbell, of course, first of all.

"You will be especially interested in these girls, Lord Glenarm," Maria continued, "because they are such enthusiastic motorists. This remarkable child," she went on, indicating Billie, "runs her own car, and last summer they motored across the American continent from Chicago to the Pacific Coast. What do you think of that?"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Lord Glenarm. "Across the prairies and the Rocky Mountains and the great desert? You see, I know your country very well. How did you do it?"

Billie blushed. She had never spoken to a real lord in her life before, but this one seemed quite natural and like other people,—only handsomer and more gracious even than most other people.

"Oh, we had lots of accidents," she said, "but we never thought of turning back but once."

"And why was that?" asked Lord Glenarm with much interest.

"It was because Cousin Helen got so awfully hungry in Iowa."

The Englishman threw back his head and laughed as if he enjoyed it immensely. The others laughed, too, and the ice was broken.

"I should never have imagined this fragile, dainty little lady had an appetite," he exclaimed, turning to Miss Campbell.

"And why not, pray?" demanded Miss Campbell. "I can't exist on canned tomatoes and soggy bread any more than any one else."

"We will see that you fare better in England, Miss Campbell," he said. "You shall have squab and strawberries and Devonshire cream. Isn't that what ladies like?"

"They like good beefsteak when they are hungry," said Miss Campbell. "And riding in the open air all day is calculated to give one a pretty fair appetite."

"The girls have brought their famous car with them, Lord Glenarm," put in Maria.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed, "so you're going to tour the British Isles. That's a

mere bagatelle to such seasoned motorists as you, I suppose. But when you come to Ireland, perhaps you'll stop and visit me. I have a nice old place there."

"Is it a castle?" demanded Mary, who yearned infinitely to see a real palace and a real castle.

"Yes, a jolly old castle."

"And we're to stay there?" cried Nancy in an ecstatic tone.

"If you will," answered Lord Glenarm.

"We shall be delighted," answered Miss Campbell.

"And Madame will come, too," he continued, turning to Maria.

"It depends on when they go," she answered. "I shall not be through here for several weeks."

"We are just Gypsies," put in Miss Campbell. "We can make the visit whenever it's convenient to you, Maria."

It was settled, then, that they were to visit Lord Glenarm, the time to be agreed on later.

"I have cousins in Ireland," said Elinor proudly, just as the lights went down. The young girl had always been just a little boastful of those Irish cousins of hers. A glamor of mystery hung about them and she had pictured them in her mind as being wonderful people. She had endowed them with talents, put them in fine old homes and surrounded them with a golden haze of romance.

Then the curtain went up, and presently the great second act of the opera had begun, in which Elsa becomes the bride of Lohengrin.

CHAPTER X.—WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

"London," announced Mary Price, "is just like a moody person. When she is sunny and warm, she is so charming one would never dream how black and ugly she could be."

"She's in a very good humor this morning," exclaimed Billie, trying to bottle up her overflowing spirits until the others had finished their toilets, that they might all go forth together to see the sights.

It was the morning after the opera and their thoughts were still taken up

with the great occasion. Nancy hummed the wedding chorus as she twisted her curls around her fingers, and smiled lovingly at her image in the glass.

"Are you quite ready, now, children?" said Miss Campbell suddenly; a question which caused the Motor Maids to smile secretly, since Miss Helen herself had been keeping them all waiting some quarter of an hour, while she arranged her hat and veil, drew on her immaculate pearl-gray gloves and pinned a jabot of fine Irish lace at her neck.

"What are we to see first, Billie, dear? Have you arranged a schedule for the day? You are to be guide, remember."

"I had planned Westminster Abbey," said Billie, "if that's agreeable to all concerned."

It was decidedly a delightful thing to do, and two at least of the five tourists were thrilled at the notion. All her life Mary had longed to see the great cathedral, and Elinor, also, was moved with a deep pleasure at the thought. Nancy, gay butterfly that she was, was not so overcome by the solemnity of the visit.

"Has each person some special thing that she wants to see most? If so, let her wishes be known before we get there, so plans may be made accordingly," announced Billie.

"I want to see the Stone of Scone where all the kings have been crowned," observed Elinor.

"I want to see the tomb of Queen Elizabeth," put in Nancy, after deep thought.

"I know why," cried Billie. "Because she had several hundreds of dresses."

"You're just a tease, Billie. It's because she was a great queen."

"I want to see the Poets' Corner," announced Mary.

"We shall certainly see all those things and a great deal more," said Miss Campbell.

They entered the Abbey by the western door and stood silently in a little group, looking up at the great stone arches which seemed to them like the spreading limbs of ancient forest trees. A pale ray of sunlight flickered in through one of the enormous windows; but the great church was dim and gloomy with age. Here lay most of England's dead kings and queens and her great men.

With a Baedeker in one hand and a guide-book of the Abbey in the other, Billie led her friends from chapel to chapel. Even Nancy was subdued and quiet in "this silent meeting place of the great dead of eight centuries." Mary crept along like a little gray mouse, poking her nose into this tomb and that, and never speaking a word. She intended to write an essay next winter at West Haven High School called "A Visit to Westminster Abbey," and win a prize for the best thesis of the year.

For hours they wandered through the ancient church. Lunch time passed

and they had not even felt the pangs of hunger.

"Just think," Mary was saying, "Henry VI. was crowned here when he was only nine years old, and the Archbishop put a gold crown on his poor little head; and Richard II., who was just a boy, too, fainted from fatigue when he was crowned and had to be carried out; and Queen Anne cried because her crown hurt her head; and George IV. was almost strangled by his heavy coronation robes."

"All of which argues," remarked Billie, "that it's much more agreeable and comfortable to be a Motor Maid than a royal personage."

A middle-aged woman dressed in black and a young girl who had wandered up to the tomb of Aveline of Lancaster, where the four girls and Miss Campbell had paused, exchanged an amused glance. As they were moving slowly away, Billie called softly:

"I think you dropped something."

She had picked up a beautiful little sapphire brooch which had broken from its fastenings and lay shining like a bit of blue sky on the ancient gray floor.

"Oh, you are very kind," exclaimed the girl hurrying back. "It is my favorite brooch. I would not have lost it for worlds. Thank you very, very much."

"What charming manners," thought Billie.

"How pretty she is," thought Nancy.

"She is very high-bred looking," was Elinor's comment to herself.

And Mary thought:

"If she were turned to stone and laid on top of a tomb with her hands crossed, she would look very much like Aveline of Lancaster."

"I think you must be Americans," said the young girl, smiling into Billie's face with a kind of shy frankness.

"We are," said Billie; "and you are English, of course."

"Half English." She paused. "I thank you again, very much."

Then she turned away rather reluctantly, the girls thought, and they were sorry, too, for some reason.

"Isn't she sweet?" Mary remarked as the girl disappeared from the chapel.

"So simple, too," Miss Campbell observed. "So unassuming and such plain, nice clothes."

"I could almost believe she was poor from her clothes," put in Nancy, "but her face doesn't look poor."

"And, pray, how can you tell whether a person's face looks poor or rich?" demanded Billie, always ready to enter into an argument with her friend.

"Don't you know the difference between a poor face and a rich one? Rich faces have a used-to-things expression and poor people always give themselves away by looking surprised."

A most delicious laugh broke into this grave explanation of Nancy Brown's.

The young girl had come back.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to be eavesdropping," she explained, "but we have a card that admits us into the room where the wax effigies are kept. You didn't know there were wax works in Westminster Abbey, did you? And we thought perhaps you might like to go with us to see them. You know when royal persons died their bodies used to be carried through the streets for the people to see. But later they stopped that practice and effigies of wax were borne instead. And these are some of the effigies. Queen Elizabeth is there——"

"Oh, do let's go," cried Nancy.

It ended, therefore, by their accepting the invitation with much pleasure, and presently they found themselves with the English girl and the older woman, who was called "Fräulein Bloch," and a verger, in a room over an ancient chapel. Here were laid out in state the waxen effigies of Queen Elizabeth, Charles II., William III. and Queen Mary, his wife, and Queen Anne. Certainly there was something very weird and ghastly about these wax images of kings and queens dead and gone, in all their royal regalia, crowded into glass cases around the wall. There was a battered old wax-doll likeness of the great Queen Elizabeth arrayed in faded finery, and an apathetic Charles in blue and red velvet robes trimmed with real point lace.

William and Mary were leaning up against each other sociably and lovingly in a case all by themselves; and close by was a large, heavy Queen Anne, an elaborate curly wig on her head and on her face a haughty fixed stare.

Whether it was the sight of all this past glory now so crumpled and faded, or whether it was that our tourists had eaten nothing since breakfast, it is hard to say. The Motor Maids always blamed what happened on the Duchess of Richmond. At any rate, Mary Price was standing just in front of that grotesque effigy, which was dressed in the very robes she had worn in life at the coronation of Queen Anne,—and by her side perched a stuffed parrot, said to have lived with her forty years,—when the young girl suddenly turned very pale and slipped down to the floor. So quietly did she fall that the others, who were viewing a jaunty effigy of Admiral Nelson, did not notice the little gray figure lying in a heap on the chapel floor.

It was growing late and the verger reminded them that they must be leaving before closing time. Laughing and talking softly together, they filed slowly out of the gloomy old place and the door was locked. And there all the time lay little Mary, as pale and stark as any of the wax kings and queens in the glass cases above her.

It all came back to them afterward like a curious dream, how they happened not to miss their friend even when they had returned to the church. In a remote corner somewhere a service was evidently being held. The sound of the organ

and of boys chanting floated to them. Following their new friend and Fräulein Bloch, they presently entered the chapel and joined a few scattered worshippers kneeling at their devotions.

It was Billie who first noticed Mary's absence, and she was rather surprised, because Mary was more religious than the others and loved these ceremonious services.

"Perhaps she is snooping about in some of the tombs," she thought, and, whispering a word to Miss Campbell, she slipped out of the chapel and began a search for her friend. But Mary was nowhere in sight in the vast, dim place, and, with a somewhat anxious feeling, Billie hastened to join the others, who had now left the chapel and were waiting for her.

"Where is Mary?" she demanded.

But no one had seen Mary. No one could remember to have seen her for a long time. Miss Campbell was not as uneasy as Billie. She was sure that Mary could take care of herself. She was a reliable little thing and knew the address. If she had lost them, the child knew just what to do,—take a hansom and drive straight to their lodgings.

"I dislig to alarb de ladies," here put in Fräulein Bloch, "bud de young lady might be by dat room loged."

"What!" cried Miss Helen; "locked in the room with all those horrible wax figures that look like corpses! Oh, heavens, where is a guide? Suppose the child has been left in that dreadful place? It's enough to make her go mad."

Filled with alarm, they hastened to find a verger, but there was no one about. Finally they discovered a very old man with a big bunch of keys.

"Come with us at once to the room with the wax effigies," cried Miss Campbell. "A young girl has been locked in there by mistake."

"Have you a permit, Madam?"

"Permit! Permit!" cried the distracted woman. "Do you think I care for permits when one of my children is locked up in a roomful of dead kings and queens and parrots? Go instantly and get the key."

"It is against the rules, Madam."

Their new friend, whose name they still did not know, now drew the old man aside and spoke to him in a low voice. Then a most remarkable change came over his aged face.

"The ladies will please follow," he said with cringing politeness, as he selected a key on the bunch and led the way to the distant chapel where the wax figures were kept.

It was all over very quickly now, but the girls never forgot the picture their friend made when the door was opened. She was kneeling on the floor in a pale shaft of light, the only one in all that gloomy place.

"Mary, my darling," cried poor Miss Campbell, hastening to her, "were you terribly frightened?"

Mary did not reply at first. She seemed startled by the sudden entrance of her rescuers. She told them afterward that the silence of the chapel was so deep it seemed to have entered into her very soul, and after the first few dreadful moments of her return to consciousness, when she found she had been left behind, she had not been frightened, only overwhelmed and pressed down by the weight of the vast quietude. And Mary was silent now, as her friends gathered around her and helped her to rise.

"I am quite well," she kept repeating with a faint little smile.

"I am quite to blame," said the English girl, taking Mary's hand. "It was I who enticed you into this dismal place."

"No, no," protested Mary. "The real reason of it was because we forgot to eat lunch."

Lunch? They had never thought of it, and immediately five American ladies became desperately weak in the knees and shaky. At least two of them turned pale at the mere suggestion that they had had no nourishment since nine that morning, and one of them, the smallest, most fragile and oldest, cried:

"What a poor excuse for a chaperone I am, that I should let my girls come to the point of starvation and never even notice it!"

"You must be very, very hungry," said the English girl in her beautiful, cultivated voice, which made the other girls thrill every time she spoke. "It is quite tea time, now, is it not, Fräulein? I have a delightful idea," she exclaimed impulsively. "You must have tea with me. You must all go in the car. It is just outside, and this poor dear shall not say she is starved when she visits England."

"But——" protested Miss Campbell.

"No, no. I really wish it very much. You will come, will you not?" exclaimed this impulsive and charming person, seizing Miss Campbell's hand.

Thus it happened that Mary's imprisonment with the wax effigies resulted in the most wonderful tea party that the Motor Maids or Miss Campbell either, for that matter, had ever been to in all their lives.

CHAPTER XI.—TEA IN A PALACE.

The motor car bore them smoothly and swiftly along through several broad shady streets. They had glimpses of splendid big houses, the front windows of which were gay with boxes of pansies and red geraniums. Then they slowed down, turned under a stone arch and paused at the door of an immense gray house half covered with English ivy.

"Here we are," said their new friend, "and I think I had better introduce myself. I am Beatrice Colchester, and this is my governess, Fräulein Bloch. May I ask your names, so that I may introduce you to my grandmother?"

Miss Campbell immediately went through the introductions.

"You will have a hard time remembering so many of us," said Billie. "Perhaps you had better call us by our first names. They are much easier. You can remember to say Elinor and Mary and Nancy and Billie without much trouble."

"And you must not forget to say 'Beatrice,'" exclaimed the other girl who seemed to the Motor Maids to be the most enchanting and unaffected girl they had ever met.

Perhaps you would like to know what Beatrice Colchester looked like? She was tall, taller even than Billie, and very slender. Her eyes were large and deep blue in color; her hair was reddish gold and wavy, and her skin as pink and white as milk and roses. Her features were not regular, but because of the charm of her expression and her lovely coloring, her rather large mouth and unduly small nose were not even perceived at first by the people who met her. In a photograph the deficiencies of her face were very evident.

The doors of the mansion were opened before they had alighted from the motor car, by two footmen in blue and buff livery, who stood on each side of the entrance as stiff and rigid as statues. But the girls had no eyes for them. They were looking at the hall of the palace. For whoever Beatrice Colchester really was, she certainly lived in the finest house that they had ever seen. The great hall was paneled in oak quite black with age; portraits of ladies and gentlemen of the court in velvets and satins with wigs and high head dresses hung on either side; and ranged along the walls were old suits of armor. At one end was an immense stained glass window exactly like the window of a church, through which the afternoon sun cast a ruby light. It was a very lofty hall and the staircase which went up at one side seemed to be lost in the gloom above.

"Is Grandmamma in the drawing room, James?" demanded Beatrice Colchester of one of those superb individuals in blue and buff.

"She is, my lady," he managed to reply, without so much as moving a muscle of his imperturbable countenance.

"Will you come up, please?" she continued, turning to Miss Campbell. "We shall have tea at once. I know you must be starving."

Up they went in a silent procession, awed and subdued by the splendor of

the wonderful old house. Suites of drawing rooms, they found later, were below on each side of the hall. The room they now entered was a big, beautiful apartment, which seemed to be furnished with numberless comfortable chairs and enormous sofas piled with cushions that were covered with old brocades. There were low tables about, filled with books and vases of flowers and photographs in silver frames. A grand piano was at one end and on the walls were fine old pictures, which no doubt were even more valuable than the portraits below. It was indeed a vast and beautiful room, but it was not so imposing as the great hall and it was light and bright and cheerful. Toasting her toes in a big arm chair by the fire sat a little old lady, and standing on a perch at her right hand was a poll-parrot which called out as they entered:

"Late to tea again! Naughty Bee. Come, come. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

It was so funny that Nancy laughed out loud, a merry, musical laugh which made the parrot turn and stare and put his head on one side in a most human manner.

"Hoity-toity-toity-toity," he said in a deep bass voice.

The old lady turned, too, and looked at the newcomers without surprise,—because English people are never surprised. The girls could see that in her prime she must have been quite like her granddaughter; her tall figure was shrunken small with age, but her nose looked larger because her face had shrunken, too. The eyes were the same deep blue, with a kindly, warm glow. She was dressed in a gray silk poplin with lace bertha and cuffs, and on her white hair she wore a little lace cap.

"Grannie, dear," cried Beatrice, running up and kneeling beside her grandmother, "we've had, oh, such an exciting morning,—such adventures! I've brought some new American friends home to tea. We will tell you all about what happened when we have had food. Is tea coming?"

"Pray introduce your friends, child," replied the old lady, endeavoring to rise from her chair with the aid of a mahogany stick.

"Miss Campbell," said Beatrice gayly, "and these are Billie, Elinor, Mary and Nancy. This is my grandmother, the Duchess of Kilkenty."

Miss Campbell turned quite pale for a moment. A duchess? Great heavens! She would never have consented to come if she had known she was to have tea with a duchess! She was quite ignorant about titled people. How was one to address a duchess? In the dim recesses of her mind it came to her that it was necessary to say "your grace." But how absurd, to this simple little old lady with mild blue eyes! Therefore Miss Campbell merely said:

"It is very kind of you to take us in and treat us with so much hospitality. Your granddaughter insisted on bringing us back to tea. You see, one of my girls fainted in the Abbey and we lost her for a while——"

"Think of it, Grannie, locked all alone in the room with the wax effigies! Wasn't she brave not to have been frightened?"

"Dear, dear," exclaimed the Duchess of Kilkenty, "and which one of you had that experience?"

They indicated little Mary, who hung back, flushing crimson at this unusual notice.

"My child," exclaimed the little old lady, sitting down in her chair again, "won't you come and sit beside me? I should like very much to hear you tell the story yourself. You say you fainted and were locked in? Then, what did you do when you came back to consciousness?"

"I think I must have felt as Juliet did," said Mary, "when she waked up in her tomb. For a moment I almost believed I had been laid away somewhere, and then I remembered."

"And then what did you do?"

Mary blushed and hung her head.

"Then I—I prayed," she whispered.

The Duchess of Kilkenty took her hand and pressed it gently.

"May your prayers always be answered so quickly, my child," she said, and sighed.

The others had not heard the conversation between Mary and the Duchess. Their attention had been attracted by two footmen, whether the same or others, they could not say; they all looked exactly alike. These important personages, however, bore each a silver tray loaded with the tea things. A third footman followed and drew up two mahogany tables on which the trays were placed. And in the midst of this most welcome interruption, for they were almost faint with hunger, the parrot began to scream:

"Tea, tea, tea. I must have my tea. Polly wants her tea."

"Will you be quiet, Polly?" exclaimed Beatrice. "I shall give you your tea in a moment."

"Indeed," said the wise old bird. "Dear me, I'm sorry I *spake*."

There was a general laugh at this and suddenly the company began to feel very much at home. The Duchess, after all, was not a grand, forbidding person, as they had always imagined duchesses were. She was a sweet, simple little old lady not half so fine as her servants, and she seemed most interested in these American visitors. She insisted on hearing all about their motor trips and asked the girls a hundred questions, while they sipped tea and consumed sandwiches and strawberries with clotted cream and cookies, very different from American cookies because they were not sweet.

"Does one carry firearms in America?" she asked Miss Campbell.

"Oh, no," replied Miss Campbell suppressing a smile, "we are not such a

wild country as you think. It is unlawful to carry concealed weapons, and of course one would never think of carrying a pistol in one's belt."

In the meantime, Billie was saying to Beatrice:

"Aren't you afraid to invite strangers into your house like this? How do you know we are not—well, say a band of thieves? Cousin Helen chief pirate and all of us assistant pirates?"

Beatrice laughed.

"What a droll idea," she exclaimed. "Of course you are not in the least like adventuresses; but then I had another very good reason, because, you see, I had heard all about you."

"Heard about us?" they cried, astounded.

"Oh, yes, and I recognized you at once, because Uncle Dodo had only described you to me this morning and I knew quite well I could not be mistaken,—a small blue-eyed lady with white hair and four young girls,—and you are to visit Uncle's place in Ireland with Madame Cortinas, the singer, and maybe I shall be there, too. Isn't it beautiful?"

"Is Lord Glenarm really your uncle?" they asked.

"Yes, he is Granny's second son. We think he's wonderful. He does lots of good. Granny says he has made a stir even if he is so poor."

"Poor" seemed hardly the word to use in connection with the handsome nobleman they had met at the opera, and the young girls exchanged a covert smile.

Mary had drawn her chair into the circle and was listening silently to the conversation. It was all very interesting, very remarkable, like a scene in a play: tea in a beautiful drawing-room with a real duchess!

But Mary's mind was an inquiring one and she liked to get at the bottom of all puzzling things. Why was it that Beatrice Colchester talked so much about one uncle and never mentioned his brother?

In a pause in the conversation she asked:

"But where is the Duke of Kilkenty?"

Beatrice looked hastily across at her grandmother, who was talking with Miss Campbell. Then she pressed her finger to her lips and shook her head.

"Never ask that question here," she said in a low voice.

Mary hung her head in great embarrassment. It was quite natural to have inquired about the Duke of Kilkenty. But she had always heard that some English families had mysterious secrets hidden away! It was a relief presently when Miss Campbell rose and gave the signal to depart. It was growing late and somehow a gloom seemed to have settled over the place. The bright room was filled with shadows and the girls had grown remarkably quiet.

How glad they would be to return to their own home-like, pretty lodgings

again, where they could slip into dressing-gowns and the neat little maid would bring their dinner up to their sitting-room!

Having paid their respects to the old noblewoman and invited Beatrice to come to see them, they presently left the gray house and turned their faces toward Westminster Chambers and their own cheerful rooms.

CHAPTER XII.—A MEETING ON LONDON BRIDGE.

There were two reasons why Billie and Nancy went out alone to take a walk one afternoon some ten days after their arrival in London.

The others, worn out from sight-seeing, preferred to stay at home and rest. Miss Campbell had a blister on her heel which made her groan aloud every time she took a step. Mary, who was not as strong as her friends, was quite willing to remain at home and write a letter to her mother. Elinor, also, had reasons of her own for remaining indoors. She had purchased two books on genealogy and an Almanach de Gotha in which she wished to study Irish families of the nobility; and later she was to drink tea with Maria Cortinas and hear some music.

Therefore, those two redoubtable adventurers, Billie and Nancy, went forth alone on the streets of London. Each carried a bundle and each wore an expression of mysterious importance.

"London Bridge!" exclaimed Billie exultantly, as they strolled down the old street, for there was plenty of time before their errand, whatever it was.

"What a lark!" cried Nancy. "Oh, Billie, I adore London."

"I love it, too," said Billie. "It's so old and gray and smoky and full of history——"

"And quaint little shops——"

"And buses and hansoms and carriages of state," laughed Billie.

"And lords and ladies," continued Nancy as a carriage load of very fine-looking people dashed past.

Presently they turned into a narrow little street, which Billie, excellent guide always, knew led toward the river and was a short cut to London Bridge.

"Perhaps we should have taken a hansom," she said.

"No, no," Nancy objected. "It's lots more fun to walk and see the sights. Besides, we have plenty of time before the meeting," she added in a lower voice.

"Isn't this a funny little print shop, Nancy-Bell? It's just a sort of hole-in-the-wall." The two girls paused to look into a diminutive shop window filled with engravings and prints mellowed with age. "There's Lady Penelope Boothby, I declare," continued Billie, "and the older she grows, the younger she looks. It's like the conundrum of the candle. The longer it stands, the shorter it grows."

The girls pressed their faces against the glass to get a better view of the picture.

"Youth is always beautiful whether it's two hundred years old or seventeen years old," said a voice near them.

A very old man was standing in the doorway regarding them with a benign expression.

"Step inside, young ladies, and take a look at some of the prints. I have still older pictures of still younger faces that might please you."

The girls consulted a moment.

"Come on in," urged Billie. "We can give up ten minutes surely, and I love to go rummaging about an old shop like this."

Into the little hole-in-the-wall, then, they went, and were greeted by a musty odor of old things laid upon shelves for ages past,—old pictures, old books; curios of all kinds,—Japanese devil fish, vases and cabinets. The girls poked about the place curiously, peering into glass cases filled with faded relics: tarnished epaulettes from an old uniform; brocaded reticules; antique jewelry; little figures in ivory, mellowed with age.

"Here is something I would like," said Nancy at last, "because it's the quaintest, cutest, most adorable little thing I ever saw."

"Will you name it, ma'am?" said the shop keeper smiling gently, but with a spark of triumph in his eye, as if he had been waiting for that moment.

"It's that little box shaped like a Swiss chalet with all the carving and the little front door with ivory knobs,—how much is that?"

The old man took it out with a trembling hand and placed it on the show case.

"That's a little sandalwood jewel box," he said. "It smells good and is dainty to look at and is as pretty inside as out."

He snapped a spring and the roof of the chalet lifted, disclosing its interior of wadded pale blue satin.

Nancy clasped her hands in admiration.

"I haven't any jewels except a gold bead necklace and a ring and a bracelet and two brooches," she said timidly, "but I hope to collect more. How much did you say it was?"

The aged collector pricked up his ears like a war horse when he hears the martial call of the trumpet.

"It's worth a great deal of money, young lady, but I'll let you have it for a song."

"And how much do you call 'a song'?"

"Two pounds, ma'am."

Nancy was the most extravagant of all the Motor Maids. She often said to her friends when they scolded her for her lavishness:

"Well, after all, what would five dollars mean to me when I am dead and gone? If I save this money now, would it do me any good, when I am laid away?"

"Laid away, you goose," Billie would say; "you're not to be laid away for another seventy years, yet!"

"Well, then, why save five dollars for seventy years?" the incorrigible girl would answer.

Moreover, Nancy had the collecting habit inherited from her forefathers, sea captains all of them, and the old home in West Haven was filled with curios brought back on homeward voyages. But two pounds was too steep even for extravagant Nancy.

"Why," she exclaimed innocently, "I haven't very much more than that to spend on gifts to take home. I certainly wouldn't put all my money into a present for myself. And this box is to be my very own, if I get it. My jewel case," she added with much unction.

"One pound, ten, then, ma'am."

"No, no. That's entirely too much. Why, it's nothing but a little wooden box lined with faded satin. It's not even very antique. I like it because I like little things."

Billie opened her eyes in great admiration over Nancy's trading talent, and it ended by her getting the box for less than a pound. She produced the money triumphantly from her little purse, while the old man, smiling, did the chalet up in tissue paper. It was plain that he was well pleased with the sale. The girls suspected that he did not make many.

"We must hurry, now, Nancy," said Billie. "Your extravagance might make us late to our appointment."

It was something to be going to London Bridge, but it was something more to have a reason for going, a mysterious reason. When the girls became part of the surging mass of people which flows over the historic bridge morning and afternoon, they felt a thrill of excitement. Streams of human beings and vehicles poured onto the bridge from every direction.

"I don't feel like a person, Nancy," observed Billie. "I feel like a drop of water in a rushing river. It will be hard to stop going, now we have started; hard

to leap out. I never saw so many people in all my life, all intent on getting across, and just think, there used to be houses on the bridge before it was rebuilt. John Bunyan, who wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress,' had lodgings here. Can you imagine it when it had shops on each side like a real street?"

But Nancy was not listening to her friend. She was watching the great human tide, flowing along so steadily and quietly.

"This is the place," she said suddenly, pointing to a sort of bow at one side of the granite structure where there were seats. "This must be it because it's the first one of these places, and that's what the note said, wasn't it?"

"There she is," cried Billie; "either we're late or she's ahead of time."

Marie-Jeanne, who had been waiting with a book on one of the seats, rose and came toward them. The girls shook hands with her, and Billie slipped an arm around her waist and smiled into her eyes. She had always felt a deep sympathy for poor Marie-Jeanne.

"We have brought you the capes and the money we owe you, Marie-Jeanne. I am sorry you couldn't come to see us and spend the day. We wanted to have you to luncheon."

"It would have been very nice, but I was afraid. I am afraid now. No one must know that I have been talking with you and Nancy."

"But why?" cried Nancy. "My dear Marie-Jeanne, we haven't any secrets."

Marie-Jeanne drew them mysteriously into the curve of the bridge.

"No," she said. "You're lucky not to have to keep things. I hate secrets. I should like to live in a house with lots of windows and keep the blinds drawn up all the time so that any one who wanted to could look in. But I have to creep about and go out back doors and around dark streets. I am always frightened and uneasy; and as for mother, she keeps the blinds down all day and never sticks her nose outside."

"But what is it, Marie-Jeanne?" cried Billie. "Is it really something too dreadful to tell?"

"That's just it," exclaimed the poor girl miserably, "I don't know what it is. I only know we are hiding and there is a secret. If ever I find out what it is," she cried fiercely, "I shall tell it and have it over with."

"Is Miss Felicia Rivers in the secret?" asked Nancy.

"I don't know. But she allows her house to be used for the meetings."

"Meetings?"

"Yes. They meet there. Queer-looking men who speak foreign languages."

"And what has your mother to do with it?"

"I can't tell. She's in it, though. But we're going away next month. We are going to France. Mother has promised to do something for them—and after that, we'll go——"

Suddenly a memory came tapping at Billie's mind.

"Is some one connected with it called 'Tweedledum'?" she asked.

"Hush!" whispered Marie-Jeanne. "Look the other way. I knew it was dangerous."

The two other girls turned their heads quickly to see what the matter was, but they only saw pedestrians hurrying over the bridge.

"Why,—what——" they began. But Marie-Jeanne was gone.

"Taking an afternoon walk?" asked a voice so close to them that they started guiltily.

But to their great relief, it was their old steamer friend, Telemac Kalisch.

"We came down to see London Bridge," Billie answered, shaking hands with him. "And how are you and where are you going?"

"I am taking a little stroll. May I not walk with you to your lodgings?"

Piloting the two young girls through the mass of people, Telemac finally steered them into a quiet street and they made for home.

"Miss Campbell is not a strict chaperone," he said, "or she would not allow her young ladies to wander on London Bridge late in the afternoon."

The girls were silent for a moment. They did not wish to be drawn into Marie-Jeanne's strange secrets and they were of half a mind to confide in Telemac. But Billie remembered her promise and Nancy would say nothing without her friend's initiative.

"She did not know we were going to London Bridge," Billie answered evasively. "We shopped for a while. Nancy bought herself a souvenir at an antique shop and then we went to see the bridge. We see many girls walking out alone. Why shouldn't we?"

Telemac made no reply.

"Have you seen Marie-Jeanne lately?" he asked presently.

Billie looked into his strange eyes. It suddenly occurred to her that he was trying to find out something, and with a certain stubbornness she had always shown when it came to keeping a secret, she replied:

"Marie-Jeanne's mother does not allow her to come to see us."

Then Nancy, who had an unconscious instinct for helping her friend, broke in:

"Wouldn't you like to see my little chalet? It is made of sandalwood lined with blue satin, and it smells deliciously."

But Telemac was not interested in Nancy's purchase. Indeed, he seemed strangely different from his usual genial self, and lifting his hat quite formally, he left them at the door of their lodgings and walked hurriedly away.

CHAPTER XIII.—ON THE ROAD TO ST. ALBANS.

There was some excitement in the street wherein stood Westminster Chambers. The old lodging house itself was all astir. Maria Cortinas stood on the balcony waving a white scarf and smiling as divinely as she smiled when she acknowledged the applause of great audiences.

Mrs. Ruggles, her mother, was also on the balcony in a rolling chair, nodding her fine old head and smiling gravely down the street at an old friend. The "Comet" was there. He wore a new scarlet coat spic and span, and boasted new red leather cushions, but he was still the "Comet," polished and cleaned and oiled,—"tuned up," as Billie said.

The Motor Maids and Miss Campbell were to say farewell to London that morning. They had seen all the sights and enjoyed themselves immensely, but the wander-thirst had taken hold of them now and they were off. The tea basket and the luncheon hamper were safely stored within; suit cases were strapped on and faces and forms swathed with motor veils and coats. It was exactly like all the old, familiar starts of the "Comet" and his burden of ladies; a last waving of hands and handkerchiefs, a last call of good-by, and off he flashed down the street, his red coat shining in the morning sunlight.

So eager were these seasoned travelers to be on the road, that the whir of the motor engine was music to their ears. The truth is, they were just a little tired of sight seeing. Their days had been filled with excursions to Windsor Castle and Hampton Court, visits to picture galleries, museums, bridges, cathedrals and the houses of parliament, and trips on the River Thames. It was a relief now to feel themselves flying along toward the country.

"If we make a hundred miles to-day, I shall not be disappointed," Billie remarked.

London had not been without its disappointments to Miss Campbell and the girls. They had looked for a visit from their steamer friend, Feargus O'Connor, but he had not taken advantage of their invitation to call. Mr. Kalisch, also, had

dropped out of sight, and they had seen him no more after the meeting at London Bridge.

But how easy it was to lose oneself in that vast city,—like a drop of water in the ocean! And yet, in the great ocean of humanity that overflows London, people drift together in the strangest way, and those who have been lost to each other for months turn the corner one morning and meet face to face. Of course, our young girls had no such ideas regarding Feargus O'Connor. No doubt he had gone to Ireland to see his people without waiting to call on his steamer friends. And yet, that very day, they were to meet the young Irishman under the strangest circumstances.

By the afternoon they were well on the road to St. Albans. The way lay between hedges all a-bloom with hawthorn blossoms. An occasional lane branched off between meadows of surpassing green, and here and there a pretty lodge proclaimed that somewhere hidden back of a splendid park was a great house.

"Shall we slip quietly down one of these little sylvan lanes for tea?" asked Billie. "It will be so jolly and English, don't you know, drinking tea under an oak tree, perhaps; and I am that thirsty I can hardly wait for the water to boil!"

It was agreed that the hour for tea had arrived, if not by the clock at least by taste and inclination, and at the next shady lane they turned in. It led through a charming little village. Smoke curled lazily from the chimneys of cottages that were built with low hanging eaves and tiny little windows. At the foot of the one street was a bridge spanning a small stream. Being of an exploring mind, the mistress of the "Comet" guided him across the bridge and followed the windings of the wilful little road until it dwindled into a path and was absorbed by a meadow. Lifting the bars that separated the meadow from the path, they made themselves at home on the greensward.

"Here's the very place," exclaimed Mary, her heart leaping with pleasure over the romance of this retired spot.

"Even the roadsides in England are like parks," observed Elinor presently, as she spread the contents of the tea basket on the grass and put the kettle over the lamp to boil.

Having departed from the high road, they seemed to be alone in a little world of green. They were on some one's grounds, perhaps, but where was the harm? The air was scented with the fragrance of apple blossoms and wild flowers; their spoons made a musical tinkle against the delicate china of the teacups.

Into the midst of this quiet pastoral scene came the thump of hoofs and there emerged on the brow of the hill an immense bull. To their excited and frightened fancies, he seemed really gigantic as he stood looking at them suspiciously. They sat frozen to the spot, too overcome to make the effort to stand on their feet.

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear! What are we to do?" whispered Miss Campbell. "Look at the creature. If we move, he'll be at us. Oh, oh!" she groaned.

Even Billie's ingenious mind did not respond to the situation; especially since she saw three men with spiked poles, who had run up behind the great quivering beast, now pause irresolutely, seeing the party of tea drinkers.

Now, if they had been able to nerve themselves to sit perfectly still without so much as moving a muscle, it is highly probable the bull would have sniffed at them contemptuously and passed them by. But, in the first place, not one of the five motorists was aware of this peculiarity of the bovine family, and, in the second place, seeing the beast toss his head with a low, angry bellow, it was impossible for human flesh to remain inert.

With wild cries, they got to their feet somehow, but there was no time to scatter as the bull charged into their midst and toppled them over like so many ten pins. It was a moment of such paralyzing terror, that what happened next was a sort of blur on their minds.

Billie remembered being tossed in the air and at the same moment hearing the crack of a pistol three times in quick succession. A most blissful period of unconsciousness followed this incident. Perhaps, when the bull had tossed her, she had not come down but was still floating above the heads of her friends, whose voices she could dimly hear a great way off.

"This is a bad day's work you've done, sir, and bad luck to you," said some one quite near.

Billie opened her eyes and tried to sit up, but her head seemed to be weighted with lead and there was a pain in her side.

Miss Campbell was kneeling beside her dabbing her face with a wet handkerchief. Elinor and Nancy were chafing her wrists, while Mary sat at her feet and gazed at her with the sorrowful expression of one who is looking upon the face of a dead friend.

"Nonsense," said another voice, and Billie, twisting her head, saw that it was Feargus O'Connor who spoke, "do you think I'm the man to stand by while a mad bull charges a party of ladies?"

Never had his Irish brogue been more distinct than at that moment.

"Ye might ha' winged him without killin' 'im dead. Five hundred pounds he were worth, and no less. A grand animal! What will His Grace say to this day's doin's, I wonder?"

"Whoever he is, if he has any manhood in his soul, he'll say I did right," cried Feargus with a laugh. "Are five ladies to be gored to death for the sake of a few pounds of beef? You English are all alike. Afraid to call your souls your own; afraid to do right; afraid to save a life because of what some lord can do to you. You're a poor set of cringing peasants, that's what you are. Do you think

I'm afraid of having defended five ladies against a mad bull? Bring on 'His Grace,' whoever he is. I'll tell him so to his face."

Feargus had become very excited with the injustice of the men's views. He gesticulated like a speech maker and his voice had an oratorical ring.

"And who, pray, is the owner of this dead creature?" demanded Miss Campbell, rising with dignity from her ministrations to Billie.

"The Duke of Kilkenty, ma'am."

"What," cried Feargus, "that low villain? The meanest man in three kingdoms, who has turned against his own people, robbed the widows and orphans of their lands and trodden on the poor? Now, by all the saints in heaven, I'm glad I killed his beast, and if I had it to do ten times over, I should do the same thing."

"Take this man and these women into custody," said a cold, calm voice. "They are trespassers on my ground and I order them to be arrested."

Billie sat up without assistance. Anger and amazement stirred her blood into action, and she no longer felt the throbbing in her head or the pain in her side.

Standing nearby was a very tall man with a cold, insolent face. Everything about him had a look of steel: his eyes were steel-gray, his clothes and hair, even his skin, had a touch of gray. His lips were thin and his nose like the beak of a bird of prey.

Now, when Miss Helen Campbell's blood was up, she was a match for any foe, no matter how formidable. She drew herself to her full height of some five feet two inches; bright spots of red burned on her cheeks and her eyes turned almost black.

"May I ask who you are and by what right you give this unjust order?" she asked.

"I am the Duke of Kilkenty," answered the man sternly.

"Duke or no duke," exclaimed Miss Campbell, "you had better take back that order, or you will regret it to the last day of your life. We are not cringing peasantry and we are not cowards. We are Americans, thank God, and you'd better be careful how you deal with us. If this man killed a mad bull who was about to kill one of us, he did right, and there is not a court in England that would not uphold him in his action. Are you going to place the life of a human being in the balance with the life of a dangerous beast? Take it to court and see how such a thing would sound. A creditable action for the Duke of Kilkenty to arrest a man for saving five lives!"

Miss Campbell was growing more angry every moment.

"As trespassers on my private grounds, you are all subject to arrest," said the Duke of Kilkenty, pointing to a signboard near the bars which they had not noticed before. It read:

"A FINE OF FIVE POUNDS WILL BE CHARGED AGAINST PERSONS FOUND TRESPASSING ON THESE GROUNDS."

Miss Campbell turned to the Motor Maids, who had gathered about her as lieutenants around their chief officer.

"Bring me my hand bag," she ordered.

Mary Price, at her elbow, hastened with swift obedience to the motor, returning with the bag.

"Now," announced the redoubtable General Helen Eustace Campbell, searching in the depths of the bag, "we may consider the case as settled." She brought forth a five-pound note which she almost tossed at the Duke of Kilkenty. "It will give me great pleasure to tell in America that we were made to pay five pounds by an English duke——"

"Irish——" put in Feargus.

"For just escaping being gored to death by one of his own beasts."

The Duke of Kilkenty actually took the money and examined it carefully.

"I shall demand five pounds of each one of you," he said. "This is not enough, as you will see by the sign."

Again they turned toward the sign.

Miss Campbell was somewhat nonplussed. It seemed rather a stiff price to pay for having stepped across the bars into a meadow. But Mary Price, well up in English grammar and quick to notice shades of meaning, now stepped into the breach. She was trembling a little at her own boldness, but her voice, with its sweet high note, was clear and steady.

"Five pounds is the correct amount," she said. "The sign reads: 'A fine of five pounds will be charged against persons found trespassing on these grounds.' You should have said 'each person' if you meant to charge so much."

Mary's friends could have hugged her for this astute observation, and even the cold and bloodless Duke of Kilkenty showed a flicker of admiration.

"You are a very clever young woman," he said. "It's the first time in my life I have ever been outwitted by a woman, old or young. You may go free."

Miss Campbell tossed her head.

"Free, indeed! We are free. Free-born Americans," she thought.

"As for you, young man," continued the Duke, turning to Feargus, whose blue eyes were still blazing with rage. "Take yourself out of this neighborhood at once or it will be the worse for you."

Feargus gazed fearlessly into the man's eyes.

"Now, by all the saints, neither you nor any other man can order me out of this neighborhood for doing no wrong. I'll take myself off your grounds, and take pleasure in doing it. I would not have put foot to the soil here if I'd known

who owned it. But as for leaving the neighborhood, I'll leave it when I get ready and no sooner, and I'm not afraid of the Duke of Kilkenty nor any other Irishman turned English."

All this time Billie had been trying to keep her balance. The fields seemed to be swimming around her and she had a dizzy feeling, as if her feet were going to rise over her head.

There was something she had to say when they had all finished talking. What was it? She had almost forgotten. Oh, yes. Taking one uncertain step toward the Duke of Kilkenty, she looked inquiringly in his face.

"Are you little Arthur's father?" she asked. "If you are, you should know that this young man saved his life not long ago on board ship."

"So much the better for you, then," said the Duke to Feargus.

Turning on his heel, he strode across the fields. Billie remembered very little more after that. Mary must have run the "Comet" to the city of St. Albans and Feargus ridden with them, for she heard him say:

"Devil incarnate."

She also gathered that he was walking from London to St. Albans and expected to meet Mr. Kalisch there.

A doctor was sent for as soon as they arrived at the inn, and with a poultice on her side and a bandage on her head, Billie at last dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.—OXFORD.

Youth asserts itself quickly after a shock. That is, when it is wholesome youth with a good appetite and a good circulation, and after one day in bed Billie was up and about, eager to be on the road again.

But the incident of the bull and the encounter with the Duke of Kilkenty had set Miss Campbell thinking.

"I am of the opinion, my dear," she observed to her cousin, "that we need a protector. It's true we crossed the continent without one and got on pretty well; but America is a free land and people are not so ridden by aristocracy as they are in this kingdom. I asked Feargus to come, and even offered to pay him a salary as our courier, because I know the boy is quite poor, but he could not accept until

he had received permission from Mr. Kalisch."

There was a tap at the door, and Feargus, looking very agitated, entered the room.

"I have come to accept your offer, Miss Campbell, if it is still open," he said.

"Of course, Feargus, we are very glad. But what has happened? You look as if you had seen a ghost, or suffered a nervous shock."

Feargus made an unsuccessful attempt to smile.

"It's nothing," he said. "Something unpleasant did occur, but I shall be all right by to-morrow, I daresay. Do we start early?"

"Quite early," answered Billie. "We want to be in Oxford by one o'clock at the latest."

"I shall meet you, then, on the road to Oxford a few miles from St. Albans. I will be walking and you can overtake me. Until then, good-by. Oh, yes," he said, coming back into the room. "Would you mind not mentioning to any one that I am going?"

He left the room, leaving them wondering at his mysterious behavior.

Did he mean that they were not to mention it to Telemac Kalisch, who, having heard that they were staying at the hotel, presented himself at their sitting-room? He heard the story of the bull and of how Mary had outwitted the Duke of Kilkenty.

"I would not take a fortune for that," he exclaimed, giving the young girl a brilliant, delightful smile. "The low brute! He was worse than his own dead beast, because God has endowed him with intelligence, which he uses only to gain wealth and rob the poor. He is one of the greatest scoundrels in all England and one of the richest. None of his family will have anything to do with him; neither his stepmother, the present dowager Duchess of Kilkenty, nor his half-brother, Lord Glenarm. He is so powerful that he is feared almost as much as he is disliked. But," here Telemac lowered his voice, "it is said that he has lent large sums in high places and for that reason he is safe. But he is not safe. No one is safe. There is a hand that smites in the dark, and some day it will strike the Duke of Kilkenty!"

Telemac had risen as he made this dire prophecy, which he spoke in an emphatic whisper. It was impossible not to feel impressed at his words; but suddenly, becoming aware of their serious faces and wide-stretched eyes, he sat down and began to laugh.

"What an absurd old person you must think me," he exclaimed, "to frighten you like this about a man we all have our reasons for disliking. Let us change the subject."

After talking gayly about other things, he presently left, and they were rather glad, for some reason, that they had not mentioned that their young Irish

friend was about to journey north with them in the motor car.

They did not see Telemac next morning when they took the road to Oxford, which lay through the most charming country imaginable, rolling and green, and dotted with lovely villages.

Feargus joined them a few miles out of St. Albans, as he had promised, his kit of belongings strapped to his back; and they started in good earnest to Oxford Town, the day still before them.

A little before one o'clock they found themselves on the summit of a hill, and below them, its many towers and spires gilded by the afternoon sun, lay the ancient city of Oxford. Like a dream picture it was, this gray old town which seemed to be floating on a violet mist. Then, as they drew nearer and its buildings took on form and shape, they could see plainly the belfries and spires of its many churches and of the twenty-two colleges of the University.

The scarlet motor, speeding up Broad Street, was like a bird of brilliant plumage that had lost its way in a strange land. They inquired and were directed to a hotel, an old Tudor building, and here the dashing "Comet" presently paused.

It would have been neither natural nor human if the hearts of the Motor Maids had not beat a shade faster at sight of so many handsome, athletic young college men in the streets, students of the twenty-two colleges. Many carried books under their arms and some wore their academic robes and square hats. Even Miss Campbell, past the age of frivolities, could not resist a feeling of pleasure at sight of so much youth and good looks passing along the quiet streets. But young Englishmen are very bashful, as every American girl knows who has visited this famous seat of learning; and most of the students pretended to ignore the fact that they had attracted the attention of five inquisitive ladies.

"It always gives me a kind of lonesome feeling when people won't notice me," Nancy observed, as they followed a boy who appeared to be entirely outlined with buttons into the hotel.

"That's because you never could stand being a wall flower, Nancy-Bell," said Elinor. "Your name is not Nancy-Bell for nothing."

"Well, I should like to meet some of those nice blonde young men with such healthy, rosy cheeks," began Nancy, "just to see what they are like and if they are really as bashful as they appear."

"You'll probably get your wish. You always do, Nancy," observed Billie.

And she did. What instinct was it that directed their feet that afternoon toward the very place of all others where they were most likely to meet old friends? They were strolling on Magdalen Bridge (pronounced Maudlin) toward Magdalen Tower, and had just paused to look down into the waters of the River Cherwell, when three young men, walking arm in arm and keeping step like soldiers, unexpectedly stopped short in front of them.

One of them, who had a freckled face and very red hair, cried out:

"Billie, Nancy, Elinor, Mary! As I live, it's the Motor Maids," and with that he endeavored to embrace the whole group at once with two long, encircling arms.

The other two young men, who were exactly alike even to their gray suits and straw hats, shouted joyfully:

"Miss Campbell and the Motor Maids! Isn't this great? Where did you come from?"

"Well, of all the amazing things," exclaimed Billie, when she could find her voice, "if it isn't the two Edwards and Timothy Peppercorn!"

Doubtless you will recall the two Edward Paxtons, American and English cousins, and their friend, Timothy Peppercorn, who appeared in the second volume of these stories, "The Motor Maids by Palm and Pine."

Everybody talked at once and there was a perfect maze of conversation, but through the current of news and youthful chatter, it was finally arranged that they were to drink tea at the lodgings of the young men that very afternoon and perhaps later go canoeing on the river.

"We are all students at Magdalen College and we have rooms together in the jolliest old place you ever saw," announced Timothy.

"But how did it happen that you became so educational all of a sudden?" demanded Elinor. "I thought you were to be a musician, Edward?" she added turning to the English cousin.

Edward's face became very red.

"So did I until my grandmother granted her permission, and then I decided it would be more fun to go to college with Edward and Timothy."

"And I thought you were to be an engineer, Timothy?" said Billie.

"It's this enterprising American Edward who's done it all," answered Timothy. "We couldn't bear to be separated from him, English Eddie and I couldn't, so that's why we entered this seat of wisdom and learning. But it is a great experience. I'm not sorry for the work I had to do to get in."

"And here we are at the most beautiful college in Oxford," continued the American Edward proudly. "I had a tough pull, too, and studied day and night, but I'm here and it's great."

He led the way up that famous High Street which Hawthorne said was the noblest old street in England, turned to the left and finally conducted them through a gateway into the beautiful Quadrangle of St. Mary Magdalen College. They climbed the Magdalen Tower where at five in the morning on every first day of May the choir still sings a Latin hymn. From the summit of this ancient tower they saw the lovely little river, the verdant banks of which were dotted with students.

"And now, let us lead you gently to the tea table," said Timothy.

"But what about Feargus, Cousin Helen?" asked Billie. "Were we not to meet him in time for tea?"

"And who is Feargus?" demanded the boys.

"He is a firebrand young Irishman who is conducting us on this trip."

Now, it so happened that the two Paxtons had an important engagement that would take them away for half an hour and Timothy was to do the honors of their lodgings until their return. Billy and Elinor had already strolled on ahead with the Paxtons; so that there was really no objection to be made, when Nancy offered to go back to the hotel and look for Feargus.

"The real reason I want to go," she confided to Miss Campbell, "is to change my hat. I can't bear this ugly old motor hat I am wearing, and if I had on the one with the pink lining, I'd feel much happier."

"Very well, dear," said Miss Campbell, smiling indulgently over Nancy's vanities, "go along and get your other hat if it will improve your state of mind."

"First show me exactly how to get to the lodgings," Nancy asked of Timothy.

"You can't miss it," he said. "You have only to come back on this same street. Do you see that gray house over there with the white steps and the white front door? Ring the bell and ask for our rooms and the maid will show you up. Have you got it straight?"

"Certainly," answered Nancy. "My mind is active enough to grasp a gray house with white front steps and a maid to show me up."

With an impudent toss of her head, she hastened away on her errand, already in her mind's eye putting on the hat with the pink lining, under the drooping brim of which she felt herself to become an irresistible person.

Feargus was not at the hotel. He had left a note stating that he had gone for a walk and would be back in time for dinner. Nancy felt irritated. He was a moody soul, that Irishman: one day in high spirits and the next in the depths. She pinned on the hat and looked at herself in the glass.

Now really, how pretty she was! What a beguiling face, to be sure! Her cheeks seemed pinker under the shadow of the drooping rose-lined brim, and her laughing blue eyes added luster to the soft oval of her face.

"I think I am looking rather well," she said to herself, patting a curl or two and giving her gray brilliantine frock a little jerk, as she hurried out again.

Her mind filled with her own charms and the joy of living in a world so happy and beautiful, she left the ancient hostelry and turned her face toward Magdalen College and her friends' lodgings. Crossing the bridge, she let her glance wander along the green stretches of meadow beyond, with lovely glimpses of river scenery and wooded landscape.

And now, once over the bridge, she must cross the street, go a little way

up another, and there, to be sure, was the gray house with the white steps. She marched up triumphantly.

"Who says I'm a dunce?" she demanded of her innermost self.

She rang the bell and the sound echoed through the house, but no one came to the door. Again she pulled the handle and the brazen call might have been heard through all Oxford, resounding far and near with a hundred reverberations. Then there floated to her from above a chorus of men's voices. This was the song they sang:

"The story of Frederick Gowler,
A mariner of the sea,
Who quitted his ship, 'The Howler,'
A-sailing in Caribbee.
For many a day he wandered
Till he met, in a state of rum,
Calamity Pop Von Peppermint Drop,
The King of Canoodle-Dum."

All this time Nancy was ringing the bell impatiently. Finally a voice called down the stair-way:

"Why don't you come up?"

Nancy flushed angrily. It was hardly polite of Timothy Peppercorn not to meet her at the door. She wondered at Miss Campbell for permitting such rudeness. She wondered at herself for enduring it. And she rang the bell again so hard that it came out by the roots and dangled at the side of the door, disqualified for useful service ever again; but her blood was up now, and flinging the door wide open with a gesture of haughty exasperation, she ran upstairs as fast as she could.

She paused at the first open door on the upper landing, where there continued to issue a loud volume of sound; a chorus of robust tenors, baritones and basses, all mingling in one enormous, crushing wave of harmony:

"Bang-bang, how the tom-toms thundered!
Bang-bang, how they thumped the gongs!
Bang-bang, how the people won——"

Nancy walked timidly into the room. Through a haze of tobacco smoke as thick as a London fog she made out some hundreds of young men, more or less. At least it seemed to her an immense number. As a matter of fact, there were only eight of them sitting about on the table and benches. And from the mouth of

each young man there poured forth a pillar of smoke as from the chimney of a factory.

When Nancy stood framed in the doorway like an unexpected apparition of spring, the silence of the tomb fell on the company.

CHAPTER XV.—NANCY AND HER CAVALIERS.

Eight briarwood pipes were instantly removed from eight mouths opened wide with astonishment, and seven painfully embarrassed young men withdrew into a corner of the room behind the table, as if Nancy had been an object to flee from. The one young man who remained in the foreground to face the danger reminded her of the poor craven bridegroom who said never a word, in "Lochinvar."

"Why, I thought——" began Nancy Brown and paused. Perhaps she had mistaken the room. "Didn't you call to me to come up?" she asked the cowardly creature who looked as if he preferred death to the torture he was now enduring.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, in an excessive state of embarrassment, "I believe I did."

"But you were not expecting me?"

"Oh, yes, of course——" stammered the student, trying to be polite. "It was awfully good of you to come, don't you know——" he broke off and cleared his throat.

"Then, where is Timothy?"

"Timothy?"

"Yes, Timothy Peppercorn and the others? I was to come right here and have tea with them after I left the hotel. This was the house, I'm sure. And where are the two Edward Paxtons and Miss Campbell?"

Nancy Brown was assuredly a most bewildering mixture of child and woman. She must have known that she had come to the wrong house and that the only thing for her to do was quickly to descend those uncarpeted stairs and return to the hotel, or search again for the lodgings of Timothy and the Paxtons. But the sight of the eight bashful students, desperately shy, and still unable to lift their gaze from her charming face, inspired her with the spirit of mischief.

"I'm a little frightened," she said suddenly looking about the room, as if she had only just noticed it was filled with people. "I—I'm lost," she added with a choke in her voice.

This was not the first time that Nancy had practiced the rôle of coquette, young as she was.

"Oh, don't be frightened," exclaimed the spokesman for the eight, forgetting to be shy in the presence of this alarmed beauty. "No one is ever really lost in Oxford. It isn't big enough."

"But I am," insisted Nancy. "It's dreadful to be lost in a strange country. It's so lonely."

There was actually a suspicion of a sob in her voice when she made this statement.

"Hang it all," exclaimed one of the shadowy company in the background, "we are a lot of brutes not to have offered to help the young lady. Madam," he said,—was not that the way to address a strange lady?—"won't you let me go with you to find your friends?"

Nancy put her handkerchief to her mouth to conceal the smile that would curve her charming lips.

"It would be very kind of you," she replied with a gesture of helplessness that drew first one and then another of the bashful youths to the center of the room.

"It's my place to help the young lady, Bulger," said the boy who had first spoken.

"And why? You didn't offer to."

"But she is my guest. I am sure she expects me to find her friends."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the other, half angrily.

Nancy again put her handkerchief to her face. It was impossible to keep from smiling.

"I'll show the young lady the way," here put in a voice much deeper than the others. "I've met Peppercorn. He belongs to Magdalen College."

"Yes!" exclaimed Nancy with some excitement.

"I'm afraid I don't know where he lodges, but we can inquire at the offices of the college."

"I suppose I could do that just as well as you, Bixby," put in the young man who was host of the party.

"Won't all of you come? I shouldn't mind," murmured Nancy.

There was a general movement at this astonishing invitation, a shuffling of feet on the floor and a simultaneous disappearance of pipes, and appearance of hats and caps.

"Won't you let me carry your parasol?" asked one who craved that honor

so deeply that he forgot to stammer and blush.

"Allow me to carry your bag," another requested, as if Nancy were a queen and he her most devoted subject.

And even as a queen did she now descend the steps and pass out of the lodging house, surrounded by a noble escort of eight; nor did she heed that sorrowful token of her impatience, the uprooted bell.

As she went out, she said:

"Perhaps I had better introduce myself. I am an American girl——"

A telegraphic smile flashed from one member of the company to the other.

"And—my name is Nancy Brown."

If anything could have been more captivating than herself, it was her name, and her eight cavaliers pressed about her in order to catch a glimpse of her pretty face under the pink-lined drooping brim of her hat.

As they strolled along, the young man named "Bixby" proceeded to enumerate the names of his seven friends to Nancy, who paused at the archway to get them straight. And of all the escort, she liked the handsomest best. His name was Edward Bacon.

"Jolly afternoon for boating," remarked the handsome Edward, pointing to the pretty river below dotted with small craft. "Wouldn't it be good sport, Miss Brown, to bring Peppercorn and your friends along for a row before supper? Would they like it, do you suppose?"

"Like it? They would love it," cried Nancy. "That is what they expected to do anyway. Do hurry."

It took some time, however, to find Timothy's address and then locate his lodgings, which were indeed very much like those Nancy had mistaken for his. A neat-looking woman answered the bell this time, and curtseyed with an old-world politeness.

"Please, Miss, are you Miss Nancy Brown?" asked the woman respectfully.

"Yes."

"The lady says as how they couldn't wait for you any longer. You wuz to follow with the young man down High Street to Carfax Tower; then to Oxford Castle and His Majesty's Prison."

Nancy felt rather hurt. But of course she had no means of knowing that Billie and Edward had gone back to the hotel to find her before they had proceeded on their way to Carfax Tower and Oxford Castle. It was much too beautiful an afternoon to waste indoors, and not being especially uneasy about Nancy, remembering that she was with Feargus, they had concluded that she could not possibly miss the way, and so departed with easy consciences.

"I say, you know, that's jolly mean of them to leave you in the lurch like that, Miss Brown," exclaimed one of the cavaliers. "Oxford Tower is way over on

the other side of town. We could get in a little row before they finished looking at it. What do you say?"

Nancy hesitated; drooped her lashes; looked serious a moment, and then smiled.

"I believe I'll risk it," she said. "It would be fun and I don't feel a bit like taking that long walk. I have already walked miles, I believe."

We will admit that it was naughty of Nancy to do this reckless thing,—rowing off in a college barge with eight strange young men. But she did not intend to be naughty. She only wanted to enjoy herself under the drooping pink brim of her pretty hat. And after all, it isn't every girl who has eight handsome cavaliers to row her on one of the loveliest rivers in all England. Once in the long boat with her small feet on somebody's coat to keep them dry, one young man holding the white silk parasol and another the hand bag, and all of them entertaining her at once, Nancy quite forgot that she was engaged in an unconventional adventure. It did not seem to occur to the bashful students, either, so bewildered were they by this charming young American who was modest and demure and still not shy. They had not met a girl like her before.

"Why don't you sing?" she suggested, as the boat cut through the little rippling waves with a gentle, soothing music.

"Would you care to hear us? We have a pretty good double quartette?"

"Oh, do," she ordered, settling herself down to listen to the music and watch the green shores glide past.

They sang "Nancy Lee" out of compliment to the guest of honor, and when they came to the chorus the vibration of their combined voices rocked the boat and the guest of honor clutched the sides and looked fearfully toward shore.

Gradually an uneasiness began to creep into Nancy's heart. It may have been caused by the rocking of the boat, and it may have been a very black cloud that now obscured the heavens, forming an angry background to the vivid green of the trees and shrubbery on the shores of the little river.

What would Miss Campbell say, and Billie, and the others, when they heard of her unladylike behavior? She was actually taking a boat ride with eight strangers! And all for what?

Because she was wearing her most becoming hat lined with pink!

There was a distant rumble of thunder. Then a sudden draught of damp air. All along the river's placid surface little boats were scurrying to shore like schools of frightened tadpoles.

"To the shore," shouted Edward Bacon. "The rain's upon us!"

A sheet of rain blew into their faces and a gust of wind, as if with malicious intent, lifted Nancy's prized hat, pins and all, straight off her head and landed it on the water, where it floated along like a big pink lily pad.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "My hat! My pretty pink hat!"

Then into the water jumped the gallant Edward Bacon, seized the hat before he was waist deep and composedly brought it to land.

"Oh, I know it was wrong for me to come," wept the young girl. "Oh, dear, I shouldn't have done it and now I'm being punished!"

It was a hard price, surely, to pay for this escapade: to lose her most cherished possession,—for the pink hat bore only a bedraggled and distant resemblance to its former self.

"Come along," exclaimed Edward Bacon, almost brusquely. "There's no time now to cry over spilt hats. We'll have to beat it to some house out of the rain."

Nancy was nearly carried by two of her cavaliers as she ran. They rushed up a wood path which led apparently to a pretty little rustic house in a garden. And as the rain was now falling in torrents, they rushed through the open door into the hall without waiting for an invitation.

CHAPTER XVI.—STOLEN HOSPITALITY.

Once in the hallway, the young people gazed rather fearfully about. But the place seemed quite empty of all human beings, although every door was stretched wide open; and through the long windows in the little drawing-room opening straight onto the lawn the rain was beating furiously.

"You had better shut up everything," ordered Edward Bacon. "The place will be flooded in a minute."

There were several bedrooms on the same floor, the villa being a one-story cottage; but they also were empty, as could be plainly seen from the open doors. Presently the students had closed all the casements against the driving rain and gathered in the drawing-room.

"I feel like Goldilocks and the three bears," remarked Nancy, half laughing and half crying as she sat down in the drawing-room and looked about her with the air of a martyred saint.

We are obliged to admit that Nancy, having sacrificed her best hat, felt that she had made sufficient recompense for her sins.

The room was very simply furnished with wicker chairs and chintz curtains, but it possessed the peculiar charm of the English cottage with its deep casement windows, low ceilings and polished hardwood floors.

"I don't seem to know this house," observed the young man named Bulger.

"I was here last spring," said Bixby. "It was closed then. The owner is usually abroad, a gardener told me."

"Well, whoever he is, I hope heaven will reward him for giving us shelter in the time of storm," remarked Edward.

Nancy shivered.

"Miss Brown is cold," exclaimed one of the students. "Do you suppose the proprietor would mind if we set a match to his logs?"

"We'll take the risk," said another, lighting a pile of wood in the open fireplace.

"Polly, put the kettle on and we'll all have tea," commanded Edward, pointing to a tray on a wicker table on which were tea things ready for use.

The young man answering to the name of "Polly" obediently started the flame on the alcohol lamp, and another student, growing bolder still, penetrated the kitchen premises of the villa and returned with a handful of cups and saucers.

"Might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb," observed Edward. "Did you find any bread and butter in the larder?"

"No; tea biscuit,—a tin full," cried "Polly," depositing a tin box on the table.

All this time Nancy Brown, enthroned in the largest and most comfortable chair in the room, was being waited on like a small queen.

Her curls had curled closer from the dampness; her little feet on the brass fender were drying comfortably and the uneasy thought of how she was to explain things to Miss Helen Campbell was stowed away somewhere in the back of her mind.

"Here's to our host, whoever he is," exclaimed Edward, raising his cup of tea and then putting it to his lips. "Whoever he is, may he be granted peace and prosperity for his unconscious hospitality."

"And how do we know it's a man?" demanded Nancy.

"Because there's not a trace of femininity in the whole room," said Edward. "There are pipes and tobacco jars and a box of cigars. Here are some scientific magazines and books,—do you think any woman would read those?"

"There's a boy here," put in another student, holding up a rubber ball in one hand and a book of fairy tales in the other.

"Wouldn't a girl play with a ball and read fairy tales?" asked Nancy, feeling that she must stand up for the rights of her sex even in the matter of games and

books.

"Oh, of course. But she wouldn't play with lead soldiers, would she?" asked Bixby, displaying a small toy soldier he had found on the floor.

"Marvelous! Marvelous!" said Bulger. "And now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, what other facts do you gather from this slight evidence?"

"I should say, my dear Watson," answered Bixby, pulling a cap over his eyes and folding his arms, "that the owner of the villa was of small stature. I judge that from the size of his foot." He held up a man's bedroom slipper that he had drawn from under Nancy's chair. It was indeed hardly larger than a boy's slipper. "He is a widower with one son. He lives abroad most of the time and comes to Oxford in the spring because he loves nature; so much so that he goes out walking and forgets to notice what the weather is. He is a man of studious habits because he has a student's lamp and slippers ready for comfort the instant night drops her sable curtain. He is a small, amiable character, hospitable, as we can testify, with refreshment ready for all chance guests from one to eight or nine. He is agreeable——"

"How do you know that?"

"His house—his house, my dear Watson. Can't you see that only a person of an amiable, trusting nature would go out and leave every door and window stretched wide? We will picture to ourselves, then, the hospitable owner of this villa as a small, dapper, wholesome gentleman with an amiable heart and a gentle nature——"

A heavy step was heard in the hall; a shadow darkened the doorway and a shrill strident voice exclaimed:

"Well, I never!"

Instantly nine pairs of eyes were focused in the same direction. There were nine simultaneous exclamations of one sort or another. Polly stifled a laugh. Nancy cried "Oh!" Edward Bacon was heard to say in a deep basso: "Cæsar's ghost!"

There entered the room a female person of tremendous size and proportions. Only one woman in the world could be as huge as that. Nancy looked at her face closely and shrank back in her chair. It was Felicia Rivers.

She was dripping wet. Streams of water ran down her ample sides and she shook herself like a sea lion, scattering the moisture about her in every direction.

"You are the Master's friends, young gentlemen, I suppose?" she observed.

"We hope so," answered Edward Bacon, somewhat doubtfully.

"And where is the master?"

"Held up by the shower, I suppose. We came in and helped ourselves, you see. We were in the worst of it, and this young lady was so cold."

If Felicia Rivers recalled Nancy, she made no sign of any recognition. In-

deed, she only gave the young girl a passing glance.

"I am the new housekeeper," she announced.

"Have a cup of tea?" suggested Edward.

"It would be most grateful, young gentlemen. I'm that wet and tired. I hope I may never take another railway journey. London's the place for me, gentlemen. I ain't the one to make excursions to the country. I'm a very 'ospitable person an' I likes my own home, an' a very nice 'ome it is, young sirs; Jetson Terrace—large, light an' airy rooms; good service and candles prowided."

Nancy stifled a laugh when she recalled Miss Felicia Rivers' lodging house. She seemed to see the great creature again sitting before the kitchen fire eating sausages and buttered toast while she murmured: "Large, light and airy rooms; good service; candles prowided."

Miss Rivers sat down and sipped her tea comfortably.

One of the students glanced uneasily out of the window.

"The rain is over. We had better be going," he said.

"Will you thank your master for us, please, and tell him we enjoyed his hospitality and the shelter of his home in the storm?" Edward remarked politely to the housekeeper.

"Since you are such friends of the masters, young sirs," said Miss Rivers, "you must be on the right side." She paused and looked at them inquiringly.

"We trust so," replied Edward.

"Maybe, then, you'd take interest in the bit of news I've brought with me down from London," continued the woman, a crafty look in her small fishy eyes that Nancy seemed to remember as if she had seen it only yesterday.

"We would, of course," said Edward.

"Then, come close to me and I'll tell ye," whispered the loquacious being, who, it was plain, was bursting with her news. "Tweedledum is in a great rage and no mistakes, and he's going to Ireland."

Only Nancy did not smile at this piece of interesting information.

"Indeed," said Edward Bacon, "how very interesting. We must be going. Don't disturb yourself, Madam, we'll just leave the way we came in, by the open front door. Good day."

They hastened from the villa just as the last rays of the setting sun gleamed through a bank of clouds.

"Mad as a March hare," Nancy heard one of the students say.

"She has fatty degeneration of the brain, I suppose," said another.

Then they all laughed.

"It was a jolly good joke on us, just the same, to excite our curiosity and tell us that Tweedledum had gone to Ireland! By Jove, but that's a thrilling bit of news," exclaimed Edward Bacon.

They turned over the boat to drain it out, and once more embarked on the little river.

Nancy had gradually become very weary of her eight cavaliers. She yearned infinitely to be back with Miss Campbell and her friends. With sad and tearful eyes she gazed on the ruins of her pink hat.

"I've been wicked,—I've been wicked! Will they ever forgive me?" she thought, while two hot tears rolled down her cheeks and fell on the rumpled folds of her damp dress.

"Don't cry," whispered the student sitting beside her in the stern of the boat. "There are lots of hat stores in Oxford. Can't it be furbished up a bit?" He pointed to the crushed mass of pink.

"It isn't the hat,—at least not entirely," sobbed Nancy. "It's because I went off like this without leaving word and with so many strange b-boys."

"But we aren't altogether strange, you see, because several of us know Peppercorn and the Paxtons," the young man assured her.

As the boat skimmed over the waters back toward Oxford and Nancy saw the towers of St. Magdalen's glistening in the sunshine, she began to feel more and more uncomfortable and wretched. Perhaps Miss Campbell would send her back to America with a note to her mother and father that she could not be responsible for a girl like Nancy. She would lose her three friends, Billie and Elinor and Mary. She would not visit the castle in Ireland, nor see Maria again, and then—there was her best hat,—ruined—utterly ruined. She choked down her sobs. She must command herself before all these strangers. Dipping her handkerchief into the water, she dabbled her eyes pathetically.

"I'm afraid you'll think American girls are dreadful cry babies," she said, "but, you see, I know I've done wrong and I can't think of any explanation or excuse."

The eight young men were deeply sympathetic. Nancy weeping was quite as fascinating to them as Nancy smiling and demure.

"Never regret the past. Think only of the future," observed a cadaverous-looking student regarding Nancy through the double lenses of a pair of large spectacles like a quizzical owl.

Nancy gazed at him doubtfully.

"I'm trying to think of the future," she answered. "That's why I'm unhappy."

"Could any one have the heart to scold you?" asked the spectacled student.

She did not reply, but her heart remained decidedly unquiet and troubled, and she desired earnestly to make the confession and take the medicine, whatever it was to be. At least she would have something interesting to tell them: Felicia Rivers and that queer thing about Tweedledum.

However, like half the world, Nancy was very apt to magnify her troubles.

Nothing could exceed her misery when she hastened up High Street half an hour later with her escort of eight. At the hotel she found that her friends had not returned. Why should she have imagined that she was the only person who had been caught in the rain that afternoon? After eight friendly handshakes and a sad little smile for eight at once, she hurried to her room. Now that they had not missed her, it would be much easier to confess her sins. At last they burst into the apartment as bedraggled and damp as she herself had been, but bearing a bit of information which the newsboys had been calling out for some time in the street below, although Nancy had been too occupied to notice what they were saying.

"Nancy, what do you think has happened?" cried Billie, rushing to her friend, without so much as inquiring about the two exciting hours which had intervened between this and their last meeting. "Little Arthur, the Duke of Kilkenty's youngest son—do you remember, Nancy—our little Arthur,—has been kidnapped? Now, what do you think of that for a thrilling piece of news?"

"But who kidnapped him?" demanded Nancy childishly.

"How under the sun do we know?" answered Billie.

"I suppose the Duke has lots of enemies. He is a very cruel man," observed Mary.

"Where's Feargus?" asked Nancy suddenly.

"He's below. We saw him as we came in, reading the paper. But where have you been, you naughty Nancy-Bell?"

Nancy slipped her arms around Miss Campbell's neck.

"Will you promise not to scold me if I tell you beforehand that I'm sorry if I've been wicked, and I'll never, never do such a thing again?" she asked in her most beguiling tones.

Miss Campbell was not proof against such coaxing as this.

"Of course, you sweet child," she answered. "And I believe you are genuinely sorry. I see you've been weeping."

Then Nancy related the adventures of the afternoon.

"You see they knew the two Paxtons and Timothy Peppercorn and they were Oxford students and so nice——"

"Eight of them at once?" exclaimed her friends.

Nancy nodded and blushed.

"Why, you must have looked like Queen Elizabeth sailing down the Thames in her royal barge with all her courtiers," laughed Mary Price.

"But the most interesting part is yet to come," continued Nancy. She had saved the tid-bit of Felicia Rivers and Tweedledum till the last. "Isn't it the queerest thing?" she said when she had finished.

"It might be, or it might not be, just as it happens," answered Miss Campbell. "Felicia Rivers may have obtained a position as housekeeper. They do say that

most of the lodging-house keepers in London were formerly housekeepers. But I wonder at any one's engaging a great creature like that to look after his house."

"And you won't write home to mother and father that I have been naughty?" asked Nancy, embracing Miss Campbell.

"No, child, I won't even scold this time. I strongly suspect that the ruin of your best hat was punishment enough."

That night the Motor Maids had a serenade. A chorus of eight robust voices sang beneath their windows to an accompaniment of banjos and guitars. It began with "Nancy Lee" and the chorus of "Yo-ho-ho's" nearly rocked the old building on its ancient foundations; and it ended with "The Moon Is Rising Slow, My Love," sung with so much feeling and such wistful cadences that the four young girls kneeling at the windows, wrapped in shawls and dressing-gowns, shook with suppressed laughter. One of them blushed at the disquieting thought that eight hearts could be beating for her own self in unison.

The next morning Miss Campbell and the Motor Maids achieved a triumphal departure from the ancient city of learning. Eleven students of the Universities of Oxford gathered in front of the hotel and waved them a last farewell.

CHAPTER XVII.—AN INCIDENT ON THE ROAD.

No rain came to mar their excursion to Stratford-on-Avon, the home of Shakespeare. All day they lingered in the quaint, charming town and, under the spell of traditions and memories, their own identities seemed to fade into insignificance. Journeying thus, the most carefully brought up person may become a happy vagabond, without past or future and only a delightful present.

That night they slept in the town of Warwick and the next day explored the old city and the splendid castle, the ancient and stately home of the Earls of Warwick.

"It's so beautiful and so what a castle should be, it makes me feel like weeping," Mary exclaimed.

Feargus, who knew the country well, had conducted them to a bridge spanning the Avon, where just at sunset they took a last long look at the towers and

battlements, the massive buttresses and walls of the historic place.

The next morning, turning their faces resolutely toward the North, they pushed on through a country of surpassing greenness and charm. And so for days they traveled, lingering or not as the spirit moved them, but always following the North Star, which they seldom saw, being weary when night came and ready for bed as soon as supper was over.

All through this happy time, the "Comet" conducted himself so admirably that the good fairy must have touched him with her wand. Not once did he show any indication of balking over his labors. But the worm will turn, even when it is a magnificent worm fitted with a gasoline engine and rubber tires, and the "Comet" at last indulged in what appeared to be a nervous breakdown.

It was while they were still in the "border country," and the road ambled along through a valley shut in by foothills on one side and a gurgling, busy little river on the other. First it was the rear tire that burst with a loud report, waking the echoes in that quiet region.

"What a nuisance," exclaimed Billie, "now we shall have to lose time while we put on another."

"We have plenty of time to lose, it strikes me," put in Miss Campbell. "For my part, I've forgotten there was such a thing as time."

"But it's always loss of time when one has to mend broken things," answered her impatient relative, in whom the going-on fever was becoming a highly developed quality.

Out they scrambled and Billie and Mary went to work to replace the tire, Feargus, their courier, who had proved a light-hearted and agreeable companion, helping them all he could.

Miss Campbell, placidly watching them from her cushion on a green bank at the side of the road, felt that punctured tires were a small incident in the scheme of affairs. Several country vehicles passed while they labored, and at last a country fellow driving a one-horse cart drew rein and regarded them with grave interest.

"Tha' wouldst do better wi' a horse that only casts a shoe once an' a while," he observed.

Feargus smiled.

"If you had your choice, my man, I'm thinkin' you'd take the car, surely, and buy ten horses with the money it would bring you."

"Come, come, now," exclaimed the country man, settling himself comfortably on the seat and preparing for argument, "answer me this question if tha' can. If I stick a pin in my horse's leg, he goes the faster for the prick. If tha' sticks a pin in tha' steam horse's leg, he will not go at all, at all."

The young people laughed over this irrefutable statement.

"He certainly will not," said Billie. "He's completely disabled. But just you wait till I get this prick mended and see how he flies. In two minutes he'll leave you and your old horse miles behind."

"I'll wait, then, ma'am, and gladly, for the sight so fine as tha' tells me. A red rocket he'll be, by jingo, a-shootin' through tha' air at such a rate."

"His name is 'Comet,'" remarked Mary proudly.

"Is it true, now?" asked the country fellow, his eyes twinkling with a subdued humor. "If tha' be goin' in a moment, I'll tak' the time to sit by the road side and see the grand spectacle."

The girls always believed that the carter had bewitched the "Comet." Certainly, as he drew his horse to one side of the highway, there was an expression on his face of intense enjoyment of what was to come.

"It'll be a grand sight, ma'am," he called again while Billie cranked up the machine and proudly took her seat at the wheel. "An' a young lady the engineer, too!" he continued. "I never see the likes before in all me life. Tha' 'Comet,' now! A fine name and tha' be goin' to have a fine ride, I'm thinkin'."

Billie threw in the clutch and waited, intending to furnish that country fellow with a fit reward for his anticipations. They sat in breathless expectancy. Another moment and they would be a scarlet speck on the landscape and the carter left by the roadside to consider the advantages of driving over automobiling. But the "Comet" never budged an inch.

With a roar of laughter that waked the echoes in the surrounding hills, the disconcerting individual in the cart touched his horse with his whip and ambled down the road, calling over his shoulder:

"Tha' be the fine comet, tha' be. Tha' be a real shootin' star in the fir-mament, I'm thinkin'. Tha' flies, tha' does."

He roared again joyfully, as he jogged along, and Billie, half laughing and half exasperated, jumped out to see what the matter was.

"Everybody get out," she ordered, while Feargus, well-trained in his duties as assistant chauffeur, lifted the cushion from the front seat and opened the tool box.

"I hope it won't be a repetition of that awful night on the plains last summer, when the 'Comet' went to pieces so completely," Miss Campbell remarked.

"Now, Cousin Helen, you know you enjoyed the night in the open," called Billie, already enveloped in her repairing apron with the intention of crawling under the car.

But it did look as if history were going to repeat itself as time dragged slowly on; the shadows began to deepen; the air grew chilly and still the stubborn motor would not respond to treatment. Miss Campbell began to feel timid and anxious. Should she send Feargus for help at the next village or should they wait

for a passing carter to take them all in, leaving the "Comet" to its fate?

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a familiar whir, and another motor car hove into view in the distance. Feargus, crawling from under the machine, ran to the middle of the road and waved his arms for the car to stop; but it did not even slow up, in spite of the etiquette which requires one motorist to help another, and Feargus had just time to leap out of the road as the great machine whizzed past.

"I'm glad it didn't stop," he announced calmly. "Do you know who the man was next the chauffeur? It was the Duke of Kilkenty. I'd sooner ask help of a carter than of him."

"I wonder if he has found little Arthur yet?" observed Mary.

Somehow, their minds had been so filled with other things, that the kidnapping of the boy had been almost forgotten.

"Perhaps that's why he was in too big a hurry to help another car in trouble. He is on the track," suggested Billie.

"He's always been in too big a hurry for that," broke in Feargus bitterly. "But I don't think he's on the track."

"Why?"

"The paper this morning didn't say so."

"Do you mean to say you have been reading newspapers on the subject and not said a word to us?"

"I glanced over one this morning," he answered carelessly.

"I should think you might have told us the latest news," exclaimed Nancy irritably.

"Children, children, don't quarrel. It's growing late and we must be coming to some sort of decision," Miss Campbell expostulated. "How far are we from anywhere?"

"We are about ten miles from anywhere," called Billie, who studied her road map like a daily lesson.

"I think we had better take refuge in some farm house hereabouts," suggested Feargus.

"And leave the 'Comet' to be stolen, as he was once before?" cried Billie. "Never!"

"I'll stand guard over him. I'll roll up in a blanket and sleep on the back seat," answered the boy meekly. "If you ladies will stay here and protect each other, I'll explore first and see what can be found."

"It was a comfort to have a man with them, and such a good-natured one, too," thought Miss Campbell as Feargus disappeared through the trees.

They waited in silence for some time. At last Billie, growing impatient, started to follow.

"Go with her, one of you," ordered Miss Campbell nervously, seeing that the impetuous girl had not waited to ask permission.

Nancy rushed after her friend's retreating figure, and after walking a few moments, the two girls found themselves on the edge of a dingle. Below, in the warm glow of a fire, they could see the forms of two men in close conversation. Nearby a tent had been pitched, and at one side a horse was contentedly munching grass. While they watched, a girl emerged from somewhere with a frying pan in one hand and a small pail in the other.

"Gypsies," whispered Nancy.

"They look like it," assented Billie, "and that's Feargus talking to the man."

She had scarcely spoken when the Irish boy shook hands with the stranger and started up the hill. He walked slowly and seemed to be turning something over in his mind. The girls waited impatiently, wondering why he took so long.

Feargus looked embarrassed and anxious when he saw them waiting for him.

"Do hurry," called Nancy.

"Are those people Gypsies?" asked Billie.

"No,—that is, not exactly. They are—well, wanderers."

"Why did you shake hands with the man?"

"Oh, just to be friendly. He gave me some information. There is a farmhouse not far away where——"

"Listen," interrupted Billie. "I hear the sound of another motor car."

The three young people broke into a run and reached the disabled "Comet" just as a two-seated machine drew up alongside the road.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked a man with a pleasant-sounding voice.

"You certainly can, sir," answered Miss Campbell, "and we shall be deeply indebted to you. We were just about to give up and spend the night wherever we could."

The stranger leaped down from his motor car and began to examine the "Comet" with a practiced eye.

"Perhaps I can fix her up," he said; "and if not, I'll tow you to the next village. You'd find it fairly uncomfortable sleeping out here."

With an electric lantern to guide him, he gave a quick professional examination of the "Comet's" interior. Then he burst out laughing.

"I suppose you never noticed that your gasoline tank was empty?" he asked.

There was a moment of intense silence and Billie was glad it had grown too dark for him to see her crimson countenance.

"I'm afraid it's my fault," she apologized, "or rather it's the fault of the people at the last garage. They said they had filled the tank full. I suppose they

fibbed, and I have such a trusting nature I never thought to look and see. I am a poor chauffeur."

"You are a very remarkable young woman to be a chauffeur at all," answered the stranger, while he filled the tank from his emergency can. "Now, I imagine that will fix you and you can follow on to the next town. It's just about ten miles, I think."

They were in the midst of thanking him profusely, when he interrupted them.

"You've been traveling this road for some days, I suppose? You haven't by chance seen some people who had a little boy in tow? They might possibly look like Gypsies."

He had turned to Miss Campbell when he asked this question.

Feargus, who was about to crank up the "Comet," suddenly stood up very straight and stiff.

"No, we have not met any persons exactly of that description," Miss Campbell answered. "Are you looking for the little boy who was kidnapped?"

"Yes."

"We knew him on board ship. Isn't it interesting? He was in charge of two tutors and a doctor, poor little soul. I wondered why it took three men to look after one little boy."

"I suppose it's because his father is a very busy man," answered the detective, for such he evidently was. "He is a pathetic little fellow."

"What about those——" Nancy began, turning to Billie, when Feargus interrupted her.

"Be still," he said in a low voice.

Billie was surprised and Nancy extremely irritated.

"Is any one suspected?" Miss Campbell was saying.

"Yes, but that is still a secret. However, we are on the track of two suspects."

The "Comet's" motor engine was now working busily.

"I think we had better be getting on," continued the detective. "I'll take the lead and you can follow."

In a few minutes he was moving down the road in his racing car, the red car following behind.

"I think you should have told him, Feargus," said Billie in a low voice. "He was very kind to us, and perhaps he might have found a clew through those people. Who knows?"

"Don't you think it would have been rather unkind to involve those people in a lot of trouble?" replied Feargus.

"I don't see why they would have been involved!" exclaimed Nancy.

"Why, they would probably have been arrested and taken to the next town

as suspicious characters," pursued Feargus.

The excuse seemed rather far-fetched, Billie thought, but then Feargus had a great sympathy for poor people and perhaps it would not have done any good to send the detective down into the little quiet dell to destroy the peace of the wanderers, as Feargus had called them.

What would she have said, if she had known that their young Irish courier left the hotel that night at bedtime on a horse hired in the village and did not return until near dawn?

CHAPTER XVIII.—"AULD LANG SYNE."

Two women, one well past middle age and the other just turned seventeen, walked along Princes Street in Edinburgh one morning, taking in deep breaths of the warm heather-scented breeze from the inland hills.

Perhaps they were exiles, restored to their native land after long wanderings in distant countries. Who could tell? At least a passer-by might have thought as much from the expressions of intense pleasure that animated their two faces. And, as if it were not enough to be treading the soil trod by one's ancestors, there came to them the sound of a bagpipe (bagpipes are not so plentiful in Edinburgh as of yore), actually playing their own stirring ancestral chant:

"The Campbells are coming,
Oh, ho! Oh, ho!"

"Well of all the strange coincidences, my dear Wilhelmina," exclaimed the elder of the two women, none other than Miss Helen Eustace Campbell.

"Isn't it, cousin?" cried Billie, her soul fired with the martial strains of her ancestors.

But stranger than the coincidence of the bagpipe was the condition of the weather. It was a bright and beautiful day!

"When I was here more than thirty years ago it rained perpetually," remarked Miss Campbell. "As much as I loved Edinburgh and valued its associ-

ations with former generations of my family, I will admit to you privately, my dear, that I was glad to leave."

There was a subdued excitement in Miss Campbell's voice, but Billie did not notice it. She smiled dreamily.

"I think I could love it even in rainy weather," she said. "It is the most picturesque and beautiful city I was ever in."

She raised her eyes with worshipful reverence to Edinburgh Castle, old and gray, perched on the summit of a bold rock in the distance, like an ancient sentinel always on duty.

The two wanderers, who had by some accident of fate been born in a foreign land when they might just as well have been born in Scotland where they really belonged, walked on the air of expectancy.

Behind them followed those three alien persons of Irish and English descent who regarded the sights like any common tourists and experienced only tourists' palpitations.

Miss Campbell pulled out her watch nervously.

"Did our Cousin Annie say that half past one was the lunch hour?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Billie. "The note said, 'It would felicitate me if you, my dear Cousin Helen, and my younger cousin, Wilhelmina, and your three American friends, will lunch with me this afternoon at half past one.'"

"A very unusual woman, my dear," said Miss Campbell. "Thirty years ago she was the very pink of propriety——"

"Meaning as stiff as a ramrod?" asked Billie.

"Well, yes, a little stiff, to the free and easy American type. We must mind our manners this afternoon and be very careful what we do and say."

"In the meantime, we'll enjoy life," cried Billie. "We'll look at the Old Town and the Castle and when the time comes for lunch, we'll bottle up our spirits and pretend we are just Scotch spinsters and members of the Presbyterian Church. And, by the way, Cousin Helen, are you going to mention that in the last hundred years we've turned Episcopal?"

"We sha'n't thrust it on her, child," replied the little lady. "If she brings up the subject, of course we will have to tell her the truth."

"We might say," went on Billie, "that the only Presbyterian preacher in West Haven is, to speak plainly, fairly dull."

"Oh, my dear child, never confess a thing like that to your Cousin Annie Campbell. It is just possible she might consider it wicked to be anything else but dull."

"Are we going to the Castle now?" demanded Mary Price, running up breathlessly.

"We are so," answered Billie. "We are on the way and Cousin Helen's going to walk because she loves every inch of Edinburgh soil."

And walk they did up the steep hill, and Miss Helen never once made her usual complaint:

"My dears, I'm afraid I'm getting to be an old woman."

At the top they paused to look at the view,—and there is hardly a more beautiful one in all the world: first the irregular roofs of the Old Town, once the center of fashion in Edinburgh; then a sheer drop into the New Town, gay and airy and highly picturesque, diversified with its terraced gardens, its spires and steeples; and farther on still, the sea, shimmering blue and dotted with white sails.

Then they crossed the drawbridge over the ancient moat and passed under a portcullis. Here Mary paused and burst out with:

"'What, warder, ho! Let the portcullis fall!
The steed along the drawbridge flies
Just as it trembles on the rise;
Not lighter does a swallow skim
Along the smooth lake's level brim.'"

The girls giggled freely over this exhibition of Mary's enthusiasm and an old gentleman who happened to be entering the castle at the same time smiled with great amusement, and, lifting his hat, said to Miss Campbell:

"It warms an old heart to hear young lips recite the good old rhymes."

But, after all, the exterior of the grand old building and the view interested the girls more than the Crown Room inside or even the museum, and it was not long before they were on their way to the Old Town whose tortuous narrow streets and toppling houses, some of them ten stories high and more, were the most picturesque tenements the Motor Maids had ever seen. Through the crooked alleys they wandered, peeping under dark arches and up long flights of steps. Occasionally at the end of a tunnel-like street, narrow enough to touch the walls on either side, they caught a glimpse of a white sail on a deep blue strip of water.

At last, entirely unconscious that they were footsore and weary to the point of shedding tears, they descended by one of the quaint streets to Holyrood Palace, gray and silent, where the rooms of the ill-fated Mary Queen of Scots are still preserved.

How many murders were done behind those old walls! What a nest of intrigue and plots it had once been! Suddenly, Miss Helen Campbell began to feel her nerves. Hunger and fatigue had done their work.

"Billie," she exclaimed in a weak voice, "I am sure Holyrood Palace feels no older than I do this minute. I am ready to crumble into a handful of dust. If it's not lunch time, we must go back to the hotel and rest a bit."

Billie looked at her watch.

"Heavens!" she ejaculated. "We haven't but two minutes to reach Cousin Annie's. Oh, dear! And we did want to be on time."

They tried to find two cabs, but the Palace is in a mean quarter of the city and there was no cab in sight. They tried to hasten the lagging footsteps of the little lady, but for some inexplicable reason she lagged the more.

"I will not be rushed along," she cried. "Annie Campbell can wait. She's been waiting for sixty years. It won't hurt her to wait a little longer."

"Waiting for what, Cousin Helen,—a husband?" asked Billie, who also was weary and hungry to the point of extreme exasperation.

But Miss Campbell did not reply.

By dint of inquiring at every street corner and much impatient studying of maps, they finally found the house wherein lived this spinster relic of the Campbell family. Nearly twenty minutes late for lunch, they sounded the knocker with the desperate determination to see the thing through if death or imprisonment resulted.

If you have ever been a tourist in Europe, you will recall having felt the same way when you have been seeing sights all day and forgotten the lunch hour.

The house had the aspect of a prison indeed from outside, with its thick gray walls, iron gratings on the windows of the lower story, and massive front doors. And the old woman who admitted them might have been a matron of the prison, so stern and uncompromising was her expression.

She ushered them silently through a broad, dark hall with stiff, high-backed chairs ranged against the wall, to the drawing-room.

Now, Miss Campbell had an angelic disposition, but even angels, when put to the test by fatigue and hunger and also a strange and unacknowledged flutter in the region of the heart, may be a trifle irritable. If Annie Campbell was going to be as stiff as a starched shirt and formal and all that, *she* was just going to be a little stiffer. There was a blister on her heel that minute that was agonizing to a degree, and if Annie Campbell had been any other person but a prim, Scotch spinster, she would have asked for the loan of a pair of slippers.

All these aggressive and agitated thoughts were flying through the little lady's head like small, angry clouds before the coming storm, as she led the way into one of the most charming parlors ever seen. A splendidly handsome old lady in black silk came forward with both hands outstretched. Her tall erect figure was well filled out; her features regular; her hair still showed signs of having

once been red, and her brown eyes were wells of intelligent humor.

"My dear cousin," she exclaimed. "It will have been many years since we met in this room."

Billie was surprised. She had assuredly been prepared for something quite different, and she wondered why Miss Helen Campbell had spoken of her cousin with so much irritation. Miss Annie Campbell was certainly the very opposite of her Cousin Helen in looks and figure, but, it must be confessed, equally as handsome. What beautiful young girls they must have been forty years ago!

"My dear Annie, don't speak of the years," exclaimed Miss Helen with much agitation. "Age is the only thing that has come to us. We are still spinsters."

Annie's beautiful brown eyes and Helen's heavenly blue ones exchanged a long, meaningful glance.

"Ah, well, Helen," said Annie, "you will be remembering the old song:

"'We twa ha' rin aboot the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wandered monie a weary fit
Sin' auld lang syne.'"

"We've wandered monie a weary foot to-day, my dear," answered Miss Helen, a trifle flippantly.

"I never heard so much 'my dearing,'" thought Billie. "Will Cousin Helen never introduce us?"

"And which will be my other American cousin?" asked Miss Annie, with the evident intention of putting bygones out of her mind and being entirely polite and charming. "But I can guess without being told," she added, embracing Billie. "You're the image of your father, child. You have the same gray eyes; the same glint of gold color in the hair. You're a Campbell, indeed, and glad I am to welcome you to Edinburgh."

Miss Annie spoke with a beautiful English accent and only occasionally lapsed into Scotch dialect. There was a decided b-r-r-r to her r's at all times, however, especially when she was telling an anecdote, and she told numbers of them during that memorable visit.

While Billie introduced her friends and greetings were being exchanged, Miss Helen turned her somewhat agitated gaze about the fine old room. The polished surfaces of the floor and mahogany tables and cabinets reflected the glow of the wood fire and the shining brass of the fender. On a corner of the mantel was a Canton jar filled with peacock feathers, which, with the red damask curtains at the windows and the old faded Turkey rug, gave a certain richness to the room,—the luster of time and careful usage.

"Not a thing changed, I see," observed Miss Helen, "not even the peacocks' feathers in the Canton vase."

There was an accusing note in her voice when Miss Annie replied:

"We Campbells do not change, do we, Helen? Neither ourselves nor our homes," and Billie felt more and more convinced that some girlhood difference had separated the two cousins years before.

But the Scotch Miss Campbell was very hospitable and friendly, nevertheless. She led them upstairs, and in one of the vast bedrooms they washed the grime of Edinburgh smoke from their faces, and smoothed their front hair.

"Why don't you ask her for a pair of slippers to ease your feet, Cousin Helen?" Billie suggested.

"I'd rather die," replied that lady decisively.

At last, at an inexcusably late hour, they went down to luncheon and were served by the same uncompromising female who had opened the door.

Hot tea and certain rather queer, unaccustomed kinds of food warmed and cheered the five weary tourists, and presently they were all talking amiably together. It was evident that Miss Annie Campbell enjoyed the conversation of her young visitors. She asked them a hundred questions about America, and she amused them by relating some of the ghostly old legends that are clustered about Edinburgh as thickly as barnacles on the hull of a ship.

It was Mary Price, however, who, by some unconscious suggestion that she could not explain, presently told a story that she had read that morning in an old book, which came near to bringing the strained situation to a climax.

"Did you ever hear the tale of the two sisters who lived in the old town?" she began. "They quarreled when they were young and never spoke again. They lived for forty years in the same room up in one of those topply houses. A chalk line was drawn across the middle of the floor and there they slept and cooked and lived, each on her own side and never a word was spoken in all that time."

"And didn't they ever make up?" demanded Nancy.

"No, they died unreconciled, the book said."

"What a dreadful story," exclaimed Elinor.

"The Scotch are very unforgiving people," put in Miss Annie.

"I'm thinking their own sins are just as great as the unforgiven sins of others," finished Miss Helen.

The two spinsters glared at each other. The four young girls were quite frightened. Nancy stifled a little tremulous giggle and Billie was about to cast herself into the breach by a perfectly irrelevant remark, when the Scotch woman servant appeared at the door and announced:

"Meester David Ramsay is in the drawing-room."

Miss Helen Campbell dropped her hands at her sides helplessly.

"Annie," she said, "why didn't you tell me?"

"I wasn't sure you'd come if I had, Helen. But you will have forgiven him after all these years. He's an old man now," she continued in a pleading tone.

"Has—has he ever married?" asked Miss Helen tremulously.

"No, no, that he hasn't," answered the other spinster smiling.

A look of intense relief radiated Miss Helen's face.

"Cousin Annie," she said, "shall we rub out the chalk line and forget the past?"

"I'm muckle glad to do it, Cousin Helen," said the other.

Whereupon the two ladies kissed and with arms interlocked marched into the drawing-room.

The four girls lingered behind in the dining-room. That there had been some romance in Miss Helen's past they all well knew, and now it did look as if they had stumbled against it.

They gathered in a whispering group near the window looking into a trim, pretty garden.

"Billie, do you know the story?" demanded Nancy with uncontrollable curiosity.

"No," answered Billie, "I wish I did. And the worst of it is, we can never, never ask, because she might not like it and I wouldn't want to take any risk. Even Papa doesn't know it. She has never mentioned it to a soul."

"It must have been a love affair," put in Mary.

"Of course," added Elinor.

"Oh, Billie, couldn't you ask? I can't stand not knowing," exclaimed Nancy.

The old serving woman who was passing quietly through the room at this juncture came over to them.

"I ha' been livin' in the family this monie and monie a year," she said, "an' I know the tale well, Miss. It's the auld, auld story of the twa bonnie lassies and a braw laddie who could not decide which he liked best, blue eyes or brown. It was back and forth he was from one to other, 'til they was all three half distracted like, and there was a grand quarrel amongst 'em. Then one went awa' to the wars, and one went to her hame across the seas and one stayed in her ain countree. An' that's the sum and gist of it. And if the three hearts bracht, it was even so God's will and the decree of Providence."

"It doesn't sound like three brachet hearts," remarked Billie, as the noise of talk and laughter floated down the hall.

Presently they were summoned back to the drawing-room where they were duly presented to Mr. David Ramsay. And a superb-looking old gentleman he was, indeed, as handsome as a picture. Not one of the Motor Maids but felt a special thrill, when he smiled and pressed her hand.

They talked until late in the afternoon and the party did not break up until Elinor had been prevailed upon to sit down at the tinkling little old piano, and, accompanying herself, sing:

"'Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to min'?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne?

"'We twa ha' rin aboot the braes
An' pu'd the gowans fine,
But we've wandered monie a weary fit
Sin' auld lang syne.'"

CHAPTER XIX.—A RUN-DOWN HEEL AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

The Motor Maids had tasted the fine flavor of an old romance, and that in the very heart of the most romantic city in the world. And now, with the three friends united at last after nearly half a century's obstinate separation, they all departed on a wonderful excursion to the Scotch lakes. For nearly a week they lingered in that enchanting and historic country and quite forgot the affairs of the outside world.

The mystery that enshrouded Marie-Jeanne and her strange mother; their old friend, Telemac Kalisch, whom they liked and still half feared; Maria Cortinas and the handsome Lord Glenarm; Beatrice Colchester; and last of all the kidnapping of little Arthur,—all these persons and the incidents with which they somehow had been connected had been relegated to the backs of their minds.

On the day before they had departed to the lake country Feargus O'Connor, the one link which bound them to the early associations of their journey, had resigned from his position as courier and general factotum and hastily left Edinburgh.

So it was that, having cut loose from all former connections, they returned to Edinburgh one Saturday morning near the end of June, their minds crammed full of legends and history and scenery.

A disagreeable, drizzling rain was falling and the prospects from the hotel window were not of a cheerful character.

"Just the time for taking a nap," Miss Campbell remarked after lunch and proceeded to retire to her room and lock the door.

Mary and Elinor followed her example, but those two indefatigable travelers, Billie and Nancy, were determined not to spend their last day in Edinburgh shut up in a hotel bedroom.

"With overshoes on, and a mackintosh and an umbrella, I could face a cloudburst," Billie observed.

"When I am prepared for it, I really like the rain," said Nancy.

"That's because your hair curls naturally. It's only people who have straight hair and try to curl it who dislike rain. Now, I don't mind it, because I don't bother to curl my hair. Once, years ago, a lady asked papa why he didn't have my hair curled, and he said, 'What! make a martyr of my daughter? You'll be asking me to have her ears pierced next."

"I don't call it being martyred to have one's ears pierced," said Nancy with subdued indignation.

Billie laughed. It was a great joke among the Motor Maids that Nancy had secretly had her ears pierced and bought a pair of pearl earrings.

"Confess, now, Nancy-Bell, didn't it hurt like forty?"

"Whither shall we go?" answered the other, pretending not to have heard the question. "Shall we do the pictures and churches again or go to Holyrood Palace and nose around among old murders?"

"Heavens, no! Let's do the Old Town. Don't you think it would be rather interesting to skulk about that old place in the rain?"

Nancy assented and the two girls climbed up the steep slippery streets on a slumming expedition which Miss Campbell would certainly have forbidden had she been informed. The fine rain washed against their faces and the breeze from, the ocean tasted salty on their lips.

"This is truly a city built upon a hill," said Billie. "And what shall we do now we are here, Nancy? Can't you think of some excuse?"

"Let's do the first thing that suggests itself. The spirit moves me to go into this old courtyard and look about."

They turned through an archway leading into a quadrangular court, the pavings of which were worn into uneven surfaces. Ragged children peeped at them from the windows and doors of the rickety houses forming the quadrangle, and from the window of the nearest house a sallow-faced woman, washing

clothes, gave them a sour glance and silently went about her work. An ugly visaged man scowled at them from over her shoulder. Feeling a little frightened, the two girls hastened toward an arched entrance to a hallway where hung several signs conspicuously placed.

"Billie, I have an inspiration," whispered Nancy. "Suppose we get Mr. A. Ritchie, Cobbler, to straighten the heel on my left shoe."

Having reached a decision as soon as the suggestion was made, they entered the hallway on what Billie always termed afterward "Nancy's left-heel adventure."

Up an interminable flight of steps they began their climb, and those they met on the way, mostly sandy-haired children with sad, hungry eyes and thin gaunt women with sullen faces, scarcely noticed them at all. On each landing they paused and searched for Mr. Ritchie's sign, which had been one of those at the entrance, but evidently his abode was still higher.

"Would you be kind enough to tell me where Mr. Ritchie, the cobbler, has his—shop?" Billie asked hesitatingly of a woman who had opened a door and was peering into the hallway.

"Since you hae na' found it at the bottom, I hae no doot ye'll find it at the top," she answered and banged the door to.

"Crusty isn't the word to describe her," remarked Nancy. "I hae no doot either since we are verra near the top,—we are there, in fact," she added as they reached the last landing at the end of seven flights of stairs.

And there indeed was Mr. Ritchie's sign and a symbol of his labor in the form of a wooden Wellington boot.

They knocked timidly and a voice shouted angrily:

"Well, well, canna ye read? Dinna ye ken this is a shop and there's nae necessity to go bangin' and rappin' at the door?"

"Let's run, Billie. I'm afraid," whispered Nancy.

They grasped hands and were making for the stairs at the far end of the corridor when an old man opened the door and glared out into the passage. He carried a thick knotted stick in one hand and his face was distorted with rage. What he said it was impossible to understand, a volley of words that all seemed to end in "cht." But he ran so nimbly after them down the steps and was so close on their heels that on the floor below, without pausing to consider, the terrified girls opened the nearest door and rushed inside. There was a key in the lock and Billie promptly turned it.

Bang! went the club on the door.

"I hope he won't burst it in," whispered Billie, crouching on the floor, and Nancy, kneeling beside her, was too frightened to reply. But they presently heard steps retreating along the hall and up the stairs, and Mr. A. Ritchie returned to

his lair like an angry lion.

The girls, who had been too intent on one danger to think of another, now stood up and looked about them fearfully. They found themselves in a very comfortable, clean kitchen. A kettle hummed on the little stove. On the shelves were rows of dark blue china dishes and underneath on nails hung a glistening array of tins. A white cloth was spread on the kitchen table, which was set for three, and in the center stood a bowl of wild flowers. Muslin curtains were at the windows, and near one stood a big easy chair and a small table on which were books and papers. In the brief instant in which they paused to examine this rather surprising interior, there was a step outside the door and some one lifted the latch. Finding the door bolted, there was a tap, a pause, and two more taps like a signal. The girls held a whispered conference.

"We'll have to open the door, Nancy," whispered Billie.

She turned the key, the latch was lifted, the door opened, and Marie-Jeanne walked into the room! There was an expression of amazed relief on the faces of all three; then they fell on each other's necks, all laughing at once.

"But where did you get my address?" faltered Marie-Jeanne.

"We didn't have it. It was purely accidental like the last time," answered Billie, and they explained how they happened to wander into the tenement house, and take refuge in that room.

"Old Ritchie wouldn't really have harmed you," said Marie-Jeanne. "He carries on, but he never does anything. He's quite nice when you get to know him."

"I almost didn't know you, Marie-Jeanne," put in Nancy. "You have grown so plump and strong since we saw you."

"It's all because I am happy. One can't be well if one isn't happy, and I was never so happy in all my life. I'm cooking," cried Marie-Jeanne, in the tone of one who had surmounted all obstacles and arrived at the very acme of her ambitions. "I'm cooking three meals a day. Look at my tins,—look at my stove," she went on excitedly. "Aren't they shiny and clean? See my blue china. Isn't it beautiful? I love to set the table so much that I can't wait for meal time to come because I want to make it pretty. We use candles at night." She pointed to a pair of old silver candlesticks on the mantel shelf. "Aren't they beautiful? I found them in an old shop."

"But who else is with you, Marie-Jeanne, besides your mother?" asked Billie.

"Besides my mo——" began the other and broke off. "A friend," she added.

She glanced at the clock hastily. It lacked a few minutes of four.

"There is plenty of time," she exclaimed. "We shall have tea. I always wanted you to drink tea with me. How things do come out as one wishes at

last. You must eat some of the cake I made this morning. It's a beautiful four-egg cake with white icing."

The girls were well pleased to drink tea with Marie-Jeanne. They had much to say to each other. Where had Marie-Jeanne been since they last saw her on London Bridge? Did she like Edinburgh and was her mother quite well? Had she heard about little Arthur, who was still lost or kidnapped? To all of which questions Marie-Jeanne replied with bright nods and brief answers while she prepared the tea.

"But I can't get over your looks, dear Marie-Jeanne," cried Billie. "You must have gained many pounds, and it makes you so pretty, and what a pretty dress you are wearing."

Marie-Jeanne glanced proudly down at her neat blue serge.

"It's happiness and work and good air that have improved my appearance," she answered, cutting the cake with a professional flourish.

Then the three girls sat down around the little stove and sipped their tea and ate cake and talked of many things.

"Doesn't your mother find it rather hard to climb these stairs?" asked Nancy.

Marie-Jeanne looked very uncomfortable.

"Have you seen the view?" she asked, pretending not to have heard Nancy's question and glancing rather uneasily at the clock.

Immediately the two girls rose to go. Perhaps Mrs. Le Roy-Jones would not be pleased to have her daughter entertaining guests in this humble lodging.

Before they left, Billie parted the muslin curtains and looked across a sea of wet roofs to the real sea beyond.

"How beautiful, Marie-Jeanne!"

"Isn't it?—and we love it. The air is splendid. Sometimes it brings a smell of heather from the moors and sometimes a salty sea smell. We are so far removed, it's like being in a tower."

Billie's glance fell to the table near the window. Besides several novels and heavier-looking books, she saw a child's book of animals. She glanced curiously at Marie-Jeanne, who was gathering up the tea things and preparing to wash them. Underneath the big chair by the table was a pair of man's bedroom slippers almost as small as a boy's.

The three girls embraced. Perhaps they might never meet again. Certainly it did not seem likely; for the Motor Maids were leaving the Land of the Thistle in the morning and in another week would be in Ireland.

As they were parting, Billie said to Marie-Jeanne:

"Do you remember what you said to us on London Bridge that afternoon, Marie-Jeanne, about wanting to live in a house that was all glass so that you could

have no secrets? Are you living in one now?"

Marie-Jeanne shook her head.

"It's not a glass house," she answered. "But it's a good deal better than Miss Rivers', and sometimes I deceive myself into thinking it's really a little home. It's a kind of an imitation happiness, I suppose. Always, deep down in my heart, I know it can't last very long, but it's the nearest I have ever been to being really happy in my life."

Just as Billie and Nancy passed under the arch leading from the courtyard and turned toward the New Town, a very old man and a little boy, walking hand in hand and talking happily together, crossed the narrow street.

"There goes Billie," cried the little boy excitedly.

"I think not, my son," answered the old man, and the two disappeared under the archway.

"Wait a moment, Nancy," exclaimed Billie, with a sudden determination.

"What is it?" asked her friend.

Billie hurried back. There was a name and number at the entrance, which she 'graved in her memory; also the name of the street.

"We might just as well keep Marie-Jeanne's address," she said.

"I remember the number on the door," said Nancy. "It was No. 7, and the way I happened to remember it is when we were climbing up I noticed it and thought, 'Here are some people who live in a seventh heaven.'"

But that ended the adventures of the Motor Maids in the Land of the Thistle. The next morning they turned their faces southward. In the Land of the Shamrock, Billie was to realize how important small impulses sometimes are in the shaping of great events.

CHAPTER XX.—AN AWAKENING.

There is always some good in the worst of us. But there are times when it is difficult to find the little spark of goodness; it is so small, so carefully hidden in the unexplored depths of some natures that only the blind faith of the searcher may discover it.

Now, no one had ever been troubled to search for the spark in the Duke of Kilkenty's nature,—that is, not since the death of his second wife. His stepmother, the Dowager Duchess, had long ago washed her hands of him.

"He always wants the things he can't have and he never likes the things he can have," she used to say of him.

Neither of his two marriages had been happy. The second Duchess of Kilkenty, mother of little Arthur, was of humble extraction, it was said. No one knew exactly where she came from, but those who had seen her said she was beautiful. It was rumored that she had been glad to die and had had only one wish: to take her little boy with her.

The Duke of Kilkenty was fond of his eldest son, Lord Maxwell Douglas, but apparently he had not a ray of affection for the delicate, whimsical little Lord Arthur, whom he left entirely to the care of incompetent tutors and a scheming physician.

And now the little Lord Arthur was lost. Detectives all over the kingdom had been searching for him for weeks. Some believed he had been carried off to America; others believed he was dead, and still others forgot all about it, because the English papers, after the first outburst of news, had respected the wishes of the Duke of Kilkenty and the police and had printed little on the subject.

Arthur had dropped out of the world of his father and the people about him so completely that it almost seemed that his poor mother had had her wish at last. He had left not so much as a ripple on the surface when he had plunged out of sight, and it was a false scent that had lured the detectives first to Ireland and then to Scotland.

Was he concealed in one of the thousands of hiding places in the maze of London lodging houses? What had been the motive of his kidnapping? Was it out of revenge or for money? The strangest thing about it all was that the Duke had offered no reward.

One night toward the middle of July this extremely unpopular person lay tossing on his bed. He had paid a flying visit to his estates in Ireland, hoping to find a little rest. For weeks he had slept only a few hours at a time. His soul seemed to be groping in blackness and a dreadful sickening depression benumbed his senses. To-night, like many a night before, he lay thinking and thinking, not of Arthur, but of Arthur's mother. He seemed to see her face in the darkness. It was beautiful and delicate like the child's. The Duke closed his eyes, but he could not shut out the vision. It hovered over him appealingly, reproachfully. He tossed and turned, and at last he rose, flung on his dressing-gown and stalked down to the library, carrying a lighted candle and making a ghostly figure in the great room, with the sputtering light held high above his head. He switched on an electric light, unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out a packet of letters

tied with a piece of red tape. Among the letters which fell apart when the tape was loosened was a photograph. It was the same face which had hovered about him in the darkness. The reproachful eyes looked straight into his, and there was a pathetic droop at the corners of the mouth.

"Poor little thing," he muttered to himself. "Poor little Maddelina! Strange that I have never looked at the picture in all these years, not since she died, and I feel as moved by it to-night as I did the first time I saw her." He fingered the letters absently and opened one or two. They were signed "Your loving Maddelina."

Among the gray-blue envelopes with foreign postmarks was one of heavy cream-colored paper. There was no address on the back, but it was closed and sealed with sealing-wax, stamped with the ducal arms. He tore open the envelope hastily.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "She must have put it here, herself. I don't remember it."

He drew out the letter and read the following message, written in the shaky, uncertain hand of one almost too weak to grasp a pen:

> "I do not reproach you for myself because I am leaving you forever. But I warn you that if you are not kind to my little boy, you shall not keep him.
>
> "Maddelina."

At the bottom she had added:

> "Why do you wish to be hated and feared? Does it make you any happier?"

He read the note over and over so many times that it seemed to be written in letters of fire on his brain. Then he stood the picture against the inkstand and looked at it with a strange, frightened expression.

"Am I that kind of a man?" he said out loud. "Hated and feared?"

"Of course," the picture seemed to answer. "There is not one human being who loves you, not even your son, Max, who is much fonder of your half-brother than of you; not a servant; nor a dependent nor an equal. No one. You are alone in the world, a cold, cruel, pitiless man, despised and distrusted."

"It's true," he answered. "Great heavens, Maddelina, it's true! And what have I gained by it? Nothing. People have always been so afraid of me that if I had tried to be kind to them, they wouldn't have understood. I know Max is afraid of me, and Arthur is probably happier wherever he is. 'I shall not keep him.' What did she mean? Is he dead? No, no, Maddelina, not that," he cried,

starting violently.

"How often do you see him?" demanded the accusing inner voice. "Not half a dozen times a year."

The Duke of Kilkenty crouched down in his chair.

"I have been so busy," he muttered.

"Adding to your millions? Crushing and grinding the poor? Finding flaws in old titles and driving people from their homes: cheating and defrauding and overreaching——"

"It's true, it's true," he groaned. "Maddelina, I confess. And all I have gained from it is unspeakable loneliness."

Resting his chin on his hand he sat and stared at the picture; as the hours dragged slowly by, all the years of his past life passed before him and he saw himself as he really was.

"Oh, Maddelina, is it too late?" he cried brokenly.

"No, no," answered the voice of Maddelina, speaking from his own heart, "it is not too late, but you must begin at once. To-morrow you can be as much a power for good as you have been for evil. Where people have hated you, they will love you, and where they have cursed you, they will bless you."

Just as dawn was breaking, he went back to his bedroom, taking with him Maddelina's picture and her note. He had the bewildered feeling of one who has been walking against the wind and has suddenly turned and faced the other way.

He lay down and slept for some hours and at seven waked with a start.

"Did I dream it?" he asked out loud.

But there was the picture looking at him from the mantel shelf.

He went over and sat down at his writing table near the window. Through the open casement floated the sounds of a summer morning; the chorus of birds; the tinkle of a cowbell in some distant meadow, and the hum of the busy insects. Almost for the first time since his boyhood he noticed with pleasure the green freshness of the outer world. Through the trees he caught a glimpse of gently undulating country, a pleasing vista of wooded hills and dales.

"Am I not beautiful?" it seemed to say, "and how have you neglected me!"

Seizing a pencil he began to write a list. The first item was:

"New model houses for tenants in place of old stone huts.

"New school house——" he paused and frowned. "Why not?" he said presently, and wrote.

"Repairs to church.

"New parish house for Father O'Toole."

When the list was completed it covered two pages, and the last item was "The O'Connors."

CHAPTER XXI.—THE LAKES OF KILLARNEY.

Through a street in the town of Killarney flashed a red motor car, slowly, because the way was paved with rough cobbles, and there were countless chickens and ducks on the highway, and barefooted children playing at the doors of the thatched-roof cottages.

"Wilhelmina, my dear, you must turn into a better street," groaned Miss Campbell. "One might as well ride in a 'jolting car' and be done with it."

"You mean a 'jaunting car,' Cousin," exclaimed Billie, obediently turning the motor into a broad, shady avenue. "I only wanted to give you a glimpse into an Irish byway," she added by way of apology.

"I don't care to take it in that unnerving fashion," answered Miss Campbell. "Besides, you will ruin Maria's voice and make it turn tremolo."

"I'm not afraid," laughed Maria Cortinas, sitting on the back seat between Miss Campbell and Elinor Butler. "I'm off on a holiday to enjoy the sights and I shall not remember that I have a voice for several weeks."

At last they took a road which led to that enchantingly beautiful and historic region, in which lie three exquisite little lakes like three gems in an emerald setting. For some time the way lay between the walls of a great estate, but finally it emerged from those confines and crept down close to the waters. Ranges of mist-clad mountains overhang the chain of lakes, broken at intervals by fairy glens shut in by tall green cliffs. Numbers of little wooded islands dot the waters and everywhere are ancient ruins and the thatched-roof huts of the Irish peasant.

"I wish poor Feargus were with us now," Miss Campbell remarked regretfully. She had always felt a great tenderness for the Irish boy. "He would have been a splendid guide around the lakes; he told me he knew them well."

"Poor Feargus," echoed the others, wondering for the hundredth time what had been the reason for his sudden departure from Edinburgh.

"Do you know that one man owns the town of Killarney and most of the region about the lakes?" announced Mary reading from the guide book.

"Is he as rich as the Duke of Kilkenty?" asked Billie.

"Don't talk about disagreeable subjects in such a beautiful spot," put in Nancy.

Billie laughed.

"I believe you blame everything on the Duke of Kilkenty, Nancy. He's a sort of evil genius who brings all the bad weather, and I haven't a doubt he had the Blarney stone put up at the top of Blarney Castle with iron spikes in front of it to keep you from kissing it——"

"I would never have permitted her to lean across that awful place and kiss the stone, even if it hadn't been railed off," broke in Miss Campbell. "But I am thankful it was," she added, remembering Nancy's reckless spirit.

"Your Irish tongue is quite glib enough as it is, Miss," observed Elinor.

"I'm not any Irisher than you are," cried Nancy.

"Are you Irish, Elinor?" asked Maria.

"Oh, yes," answered Elinor, blushing a little. "I have some cousins who live here. I shall see them in a few days."

Elinor was still shy about those cousins. Sometimes she wished the mists of uncertainty which shrouded them might never be lifted. Suppose, after all, they would disappoint her in some way, and not be the charming people she had pictured in her mind? She sighed.

"Why don't you write to them, dear?" asked Miss Campbell.

"I—I'm waiting," she hesitated.

"I know," broke in Nancy. "You want to see them first and look them over."

"I do not," ejaculated Elinor indignantly and trying not to feel teased.

"You do. You're afraid they won't be princes of the blood royal, and you just won't claim them if they are not."

It was impossible to keep from laughing at this assertion, and Elinor was thankful for the diversion of a shower. Like the Irish temperament, the Irish climate is a trifle uncertain, and clouds and sunshine follow in quick succession. But it was only a passing rain cloud, and presently the sun was out again shining on the wet leaves of the beech and elm trees and the drooping larches.

Having feasted their eyes on the beauty of the scenery and visited by boat the little island of Innisfallen, probably the most perfect spot in all the British Isles, our motorists now descended on Muckross Abbey, among the ancient ruins of which they proposed to eat their lunch.

"Do you think it would be disrespectful to eat in a cemetery where the graves are centuries old?" asked Billie.

"If the dead could rise up, I am sure they would be greatly entertained," answered Maria. "Think how diverting it would be, after lying in the ground some hundreds of years, to have a beautiful young lady sit on your chest and eat

sandwiches."

Maria, as guest of honor, was not permitted to help, and Miss Campbell never even offered her services. She never did.

"There are plenty of young feet to go pattering about," she said. "I am much too old to turn housemaid and cook."

They spread a steamer rug on the ground, being old and seasoned picnickers by this time, and presently they were nibbling sandwiches and drinking tea among the ancient, toppling grave stones. There is something ghastly and crude about a new-made grave, a naked mound of earth that suggests the horror of death. But the old grass-grown cemetery which had crept within the walls of the ruined abbey seemed to have been there always, a part of the scene.

After they had finished and packed up the lunch things, Miss Campbell, following a time-honored custom, pillowed her head on one of the motor car cushions and took a nap.

Maria also was inclined to be silent. Leaning against one of the old grave stones she closed her eyes and relaxed into a half-sleeping, half-waking state that only those who lead very busy lives can really enjoy. And Maria was a very busy woman indeed for ten months out of the twelve.

The four young girls slipped away to explore the ancient ruins.

"I should think the ghosts of the departed who are buried here would like to come back, if only to see the scenery again," remarked Mary.

"I should not be afraid of such a gentle ghost as that, who returned to look at a view," said Billie. "But I shouldn't care to see a skeleton in a monk's dress sitting in one of these cells. Isn't that what the housemaid told us her grandfather had seen?"

"Yes, and the skeleton monk beckoned to him with a bony finger to follow, and he believed it was to show him a place where treasure was buried, and fell into a ditch and broke his leg and the monk crumbled into nothing," finished Mary.

"Like most ghost stories," added skeptical Billie.

"I think I could believe in ghosts and fairies, too, if I lived here," continued Mary. "There is a fairy glen around here somewhere, and if you find the place where the magic circle is,—it isn't everybody who can see a magic circle; it takes a special kind of eye,—and then lie down flat and peep through a little hole in a leaf from an oak tree,—if you look long enough, you can see tiny processions of ancient peoples."

The girls laughed softly. It was a joy to draw Mary out on her favorite subjects.

"And then," she went on, "there is the Queen of the Salmon. She is a fairy and not a fish, and all the salmon are her subjects."

"Are there any bad fairies?" asked Nancy.

"Oh, yes, and unless people are careful they will steal young babies from the cradles and leave changeling elves in their places."

"Dear me," exclaimed Billie. "How does one know whether one is one's self or a changeling elf? Am I a changeling elf, do you think?"

There was a gay rollicking laugh from somewhere after this remark of Billie's; just one uncontrollable guffaw and then perfect silence.

The girls, who had climbed in among the ruins to have a peep at the cells once occupied by the monks of the abbey, paused and exchanged embarrassed glances.

"I'm glad our remarks have given amusement to somebody," observed Mary stiffly.

"Please forgive me," said a familiar voice. "I haven't laughed for a fortnight and I couldn't keep it in."

There was a noise of rolling stones, some one leaped down from a recess in the old wall, and Feargus O'Connor presently appeared, covered with dust and cobwebs and looking so much like a tramp they hardly knew him.

"Feargus!" they exclaimed.

"Don't speak so loud," he said. "I may as well tell you at once that I'm hiding over in the glen for a few days. An old man from the village brings me food here at the abbey early every morning before the tourists come, but he didn't put in an appearance to-day, and I've been here ever since, hoping he would show up."

"You poor soul, you must be starving," cried Billie sympathetically, remembering Feargus' appetite.

"I am," he answered. "I'm fairly caving in. I haven't eaten a bite since yesterday at noon, because I was greedy and ate everything that was brought to me at one meal."

"But what are you hiding from?" demanded Nancy, unable to sympathize with Feargus' hunger until her own curiosity was satisfied.

"Never mind that now," said Billie. "We'll bring him some food first and he can explain later."

The four girls immediately dashed off to the motor car, and presently returned with the remains of their luncheon and supplies enough in tins to last him for several days.

"I feel like Elijah being fed by the ravens," remarked Feargus, demolishing a sandwich in two bites and drinking half a bottle of ginger ale at a gulp.

"You are much more like the giant who bolted a pig at a mouthful," said Nancy.

Feargus smiled at her blandly.

"A giant or a prophet," he said. "It's all one when you're starving. Another

foodless day and you'd have been eating sandwiches off my little mound of earth."

"But what is the reason of all this business, Feargus?" asked Billie. "Have you been getting into mischief?"

"It's the Duke of Kilkenty," he said. "I should think you might have guessed that much right away. Because I have a grudge against him, and good reason for it, too, I'm suspected of having helped kidnap the little boy. So I just concluded I'd lie low for a while and keep out of the clutches of the law."

"But you are entirely innocent!" exclaimed Billie.

"Yes, but they think I know something."

She looked at him searchingly, recalling the night when they had seen the campers in the glen.

"You don't want to answer questions?" suggested Elinor.

"Exactly."

"Then you do know something?" they demanded in whispers.

"What I know I am not ashamed to know. There is nothing wrong in what has been done——"

Billie sat on a stone fallen from the ruined walls and rested her chin in her hand. She was thinking and thinking.

"Feargus," she said at last, "we don't want to help you do anything dishonest and wicked——"

Feargus flushed. But the honest light in his blue eyes never wavered.

"I believe that what has been done is right," he said, "but I can't say anything more——"

"Come, Billie," called Miss Campbell's voice from the other side of the wall.

The four friends shook hands with the Irish boy. It was impossible to connect anything criminal and wicked with his honest, good-natured face.

"It's a shame," whispered Billie to Nancy, as she guided the "Comet" through the wild scenery along the third lake, some time later in the day. "The Duke of Kilkenty is like a wicked magician who turns everything wrong and crooked that could just as easily be straight and right."

But of course she had no way in the world to know that the Duke of Kilkenty was at that moment engaged in dictating a number of letters to his secretary, which so surprised that young man, that it was with difficulty he grasped his pencil. The police were to give up all search for young O'Connor; detectives were to be withdrawn from the case. The Duke had other means of finding his son. A firm of architects were to send men down to discuss building model cottages; Father O'Toole was to call and see him at once. And still the list was not nearly attended to.

CHAPTER XXII.—HOW A DRIVE IN A JAUNTING CAR ENDED IN A MOTOR TRIP.

It was near a small village toward the west coast of Ireland where Elinor's relatives lived, and the first impression of the straggling, cobble-paved street flanked with wretched hovels was hardly cheerful.

They had left Miss Campbell and Maria at the inn to rest and the four girls had taken a jaunting car and started off, ostensibly for a drive, but really on a search for the Butler cousins.

The jaunting car of Ireland is a vehicle peculiar to that country alone. It has two wheels like a dog cart, and the seats run sideways so that the passengers sit back to back and see only half the landscape as they jolt along. The driver is supposed to sit on a cross-piece in front, right over the horse's tail, but he just as often sits at the side to drive his nag, urging him on with an occasional lazy flick of the whip. To-day he shared one of the seats with Elinor and Mary.

"Do you know a family named Butler around here, driver?" began Elinor diplomatically.

"Shure an' there be a mony of that name in Oirland," answered the man, blinking at the sunlight, "and a good name it is, I'm thinkin'."

"I'm looking for the family of Thomas Butler," Elinor ventured.

"An' it's Tom ye're lookin' for, is it?"

"Do you know him?" asked Elinor surprised at his familiarity in the use of her cousin's name.

"Shure an' I ought to know him," chuckled the man. "An' if God and his howly saints are good to me, I'll know him for mony a day to come. He's a good soul, is Tom. He wur-rks all the time, for shure, and nivver rests at all, exceptin' whin the night comes an' he falls on his bed for weariness. He's a good fam'ly man, is Tom."

"Good family," repeated Elinor. "Yes, that's what I understood. It's a very

good family."

"It is indade, Miss. But my manin' was different. Tom is a good provider. There's more than sphuds on his table. There's milk in a-plenty and eggs just fresh from the hins. Tom, he keeps two cows and a great number of powltry, includin' of six foine ducks and as many more tur-rkeys."

[image]

"DO YOU KNOW A FAMILY NAMED BUTLER AROUND HERE, DRIVER?" BEGAN ELINOR DIPLOMATICALLY.

Elinor's bosom friends were too alive to her own poignant anguish even to smile over this enlightening description of Tom Butler and his powltry, but it was a very difficult position and Nancy, irrepressible giggler that she was, held her breath until her face was purple and tears of laughter filled her eyes.

"An' what may you be wantin' with Tom Butler, Miss?"

"I—I thought I'd like to call on him and his family," faltered Elinor, not daring to look at Mary and feeling strangely glad that Billie and Nancy were sitting with their backs to her so that they could not see her crimson face.

"Is it from America ye've come?" asked the man, stirring up the old horse with his whip.

"Yes."

"Ye be knowin' some of the Butler kin there, I'm thinkin'?" asked the man with some excitement.

"Yes."

"Get along with you, you slow-movin' beast," exclaimed the driver, unexpectedly addressing himself to his nag. "Shure and the divvel's put weights in your hind feet. Ye're a snail and no horse at all, at all."

The road lay between fields a-bloom with red poppies and daisies. Occasionally groups of barefooted girls passed by and there was many a lounger by the wayside smoking his afternoon pipe,—which might with equal truth also be called his morning pipe and his noonday and evening pipe.

At last the car paused in front of a little stone cottage set in the midst of a small plot of ground. A woman was sitting in the doorway peeling potatoes and a tall pretty girl about Elinor's own age came running around the side of the house with a basket of eggs.

"I be bringin' a visitor for you, owld woman," the man called pleasantly. "A young loidy from the States who is acquainted from some of the Butler fam'ly."

"And indade, news of the Butler fam'ly will be like the sound of swate music

to your ears, Tom," called the woman.

Elinor started violently.

"Are you Thomas Butler?" she demanded.

"Shure, an' I'm the mon," he answered amiably. "I'm Thomas Butler as was soundin' his own praises a while ago. If a mon don't sound his own praises, there's no one ilse as will do it for him."

The other girls laughed, relieved to give vent to their repressed feelings. So these were Elinor's much-boasted relations! Poor, proud Elinor, who always wore her hair in a coronet braid because she secretly believed her ancestors were of royal blood! They tacitly determined to leave the situation entirely in her hands, and when Elinor, whose face wore the expression of one who is about to take a bad dose of medicine, descended from the cart, they followed and shook hands with Mrs. Thomas Butler and her daughter, Eileen. Presently the jovial Thomas hitched his horse and came into the house after them.

There was not much furniture in the room in which they had been hospitably invited to sit down,—a table and a few chairs; a set of shelves whereon stood the household china, and a few cooking utensils. The floor was paved with stone slabs. On the mantel ticked a small wooden clock between two brass candlesticks, such as are used at all Irish wakes to stand at the head of the coffin. The room was unceiled at the top and crossed with smoke-blacked rafters. Chickens walked fearlessly in and out and a little fat pig stuck his nose in at the back door and grunted at them.

Eileen brought in a pitcher of milk and four thick glasses and shyly placed them on the table.

"An' now, ye don't be after tellin' me that ye know me fust cousin, Michael Butler, a sthreet car conductor in the city of Saint Loose, the name of the county has eschaped me moind?"

"I'm afraid I haven't met him," answered Elinor apologetically.

"An' is it me second cousin, Edward, ye be after knowin'?"

"Edward Butler is my uncle," answered Elinor steadily.

"Well, may the howly Saint Pathrick and all his sainted brith'rin stand witness to this," cried Thomas in the throes of paralyzing astonishment. "An' you his niece, beghorra! His saloon must have prospered surely to be sindin' his niece to Oirland in such grand stoile."

"My uncle isn't in that business," began Elinor, blinking back her tears. "He's a lawyer, and has a factory besides for manufacturing automobile supplies."

The other girls mercifully endeavored to engage Eileen and her mother in conversation until they saw Elinor stand up and heard her say:

"You haven't two sons and another daughter? Oh, then there's some mistake. My cousins have quite a family of children."

The man gave her a bland and innocent stare. It was impossible to ruffle his equable disposition.

"'Tis a mistake, surely, then, Miss, and you are not me cousin at all, at all, but the kin of the owld Squire who lives five miles the other side of the village. I'm sorry, but the matin' was a plisint break in the day's wor-rk, an' I'm not begrudgin' you of the toime I spent; an' missin' the sicond thrain with the most passengers. But I'm thinkin' ye'll have to git somebody else to drive ye to the owld Squire's. It's only last St. Michaelmas he called me a lazy blackguard, and me a hard wur-rkin' man, beghorra!"

"That will be all right, Mr. Butler," put in Billie. "If you'll take us back to the village, we'll go in the motor car to Squire Butler's."

"And we'll gladly pay you for the time we've kept your vehicle," said Elinor in tones of majestic relief.

Half an hour later they were informed by the man at the inn who had been giving the "Comet" a good dusting down, that Tom Butler was a lazy fellow who never did a lick of work except drive his old jaunting car,—an inheritance from his wife's father,—back and forth from the station to the inn or to houses thereabouts.

"It's his owld woman as runs the fam'ly, Miss, an' his dowter as looks after the powltry."

Armed with specific directions, they now sped in the "Comet" out of the inn yard, along the slovenly little street and into the country.

And, oh, the burst of hysterical laughter, long pent up, and the joy of being back in the smooth-running motor car after that jolting two-wheeled vehicle; but best of all, the supreme relief of not being related to Thomas the carter; his cousin Michael, the conductor, from Saint Loose, and his cousin Edward, keeper of a saloon, heaven knows where.

How they laughed and joked and teased Elinor, who was quite willing to be teased, you may be sure, being on the safe side now. With feelings very different from their recent emotions they finally stopped at a pretty little lodge built into a high stone wall. A barefooted girl opened the gate and up a neat gravel drive they sped. Presently they arrived at the front door of a charming old house covered with ivy, with windows opening right onto the lawn. It was not a large or pretentious dwelling, the home of Squire Butler, just a rambling, comfortable, pretty old place set in the midst of shrubbery and shade trees. Through the open casements of the drawing-room came the sweet fairy notes of a harp and a girl's voice singing:

"Kathleen Mavourneen, the gray dawn is breaking,
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill."

In a moment they were ushered into that same drawing-room, and the singer, slender and graceful, with soft blue eyes and dark hair, came forward.

"Is this Kathleen?" began Elinor. "I am your cousin, Elinor Butler, from America."

Pretty soon all the Butlers were assembled in the drawing-room: Squire Butler, jovial and handsome; Mrs. Butler, still young and fresh-looking, although she was past fifty; Richard, home from Cambridge, and another Elinor, older than her sister and even prettier.

It seemed to the Motor Maids that never before had they met such charming people. Back of the house was an old-fashioned flower garden, separated from the kitchen garden by a tall hedge of fuchsias in full bloom. The rich color of the pendent blossoms made a splendid background for a group of wicker chairs and a table; hither the entire company now repaired for tea. An old lady drove up in a pony carriage and joined them, and two ruddy-faced girls wearing short skirts and stout walking boots made their appearance. They had taken the short ten-mile cut, they said, and timed themselves to arrive at four-thirty. One of them later joined Billie, Nancy and Richard Butler in a set of tennis, and played so well that Billie felt ashamed, and resolved secretly to get into practice before she played tennis again with Irish and English girls.

Mary Price and Kathleen wandered off to see the garden where roses clambered against the old walls and honeysuckle filled the air with its perfume. Along the paths, growing in profusion, were wall flowers, stock, marigolds, old-fashioned pinks, fragrant clumps of rosemary and many other flowers and herbs.

Squire Butler desired mightily to send a trap into the village for Miss Campbell and Madame Cortinas and all the luggage, too. But the girls assured him that they were due at Castle Abbey, Lord Glenarm's place, in two days. Finally, Billie and young Richard Butler dashed back to the village in the motor car and returned with the two ladies for dinner.

As a matter of fact, this visit to Elinor's Irish cousins was the most enjoyable episode in their entire trip. And to make it more complete, the moon came out after dinner, flooding the lawn and garden with its golden light. Then Maria quite forgot that she had intended to keep her vocation as a singer a secret and enchanted them all by singing:

"'There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass
Or night dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentler on the spirit lies
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;

Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE BANSHEE OF CASTLE ABBEY.

One may become accustomed to anything, even the notion of visiting a real lord in an ancient abbey.

"We owe this to you, Maria," cried Billie ecstatically, as the motor car climbed slowly up a wooded hill, on the summit of which stood Lord Glenarm's Irish home.

"Remember how much I owe to you, Billie," answered Maria. "I might never have been here now, but for you. It was the jewels you guarded so carefully for me that furnished the funds for my trip abroad and a year's study in Paris, before I finally began singing again in opera. I feel that there is nothing too good for the Motor Maids and Miss Campbell."

"That was just an act of friendship," protested Billie.

"There are not many acts of real friendship," said Maria, "and not many young girls who would have endured what the Motor Maids endured for my sake. Lord Glenarm has heard the whole story and I can assure you he is as proud to know you as I am."

There is no getting around a good, substantial, sincere compliment, and the four young girls could not conceal the pride they felt in Maria's praises.

"They are four sweet lassies, as David Ramsay remarked," observed Miss Campbell, and everybody smiled; for Miss Campbell often quoted David Ramsay lately and had received two long letters from him since she had been in the land of the Shamrock.

As they neared the top of the hill, the landscape unfolded before them in a splendid panorama,—fields and meadows; dark splashes of green marking forests

of oak and beech trees, and here and there a thin haze of smoke curling up from the chimney of a farm house. Toward the west was the soft blue expanse of the sea.

"They do say that the good Saint Patrick preached the gospel once on this hillside and converted a king and hundreds of his people to Christianity," Maria was saying, when they heard a voice calling excitedly:

"Billie, Elinor, Nancy, Mary!" and Beatrice Colchester dashed up. She was riding a fat gray pony which was puffing indignantly like an apoplectic old gentleman who had been made to climb a steep hill against his will.

Behind her rode Lord Glenarm on a hunting-horse, and barking and yelping at his heels were half a dozen dogs.

It was all very jolly and natural,—no pomp and ceremony about visiting a real lord who was as simple and unaffected as Billie's own father. At last they drew up at the gate of the Abbey, and for once in his useful life the "Comet" seemed decidedly out of place and inappropriate.

The left wing of Castle Abbey was a picturesque pile of crumbling ruins overhung with ivy and climbing rose bushes. Here had been the chapel of the monks and the cloistered walk wherein they had paced up and down telling their beads. In this quadrangle, also, had been the original garden of the monastery and a garden it still was, carefully tended by an aged Irish gardener and his assistants, and filled with bright masses of old-fashioned flowers. The other wing of the Abbey, where had once been many of the cells and the monks' refectory or dining-hall, was now the dwelling place of Lord Glenarm for at least six weeks in the year.

"Uncle says that one wing is a 'reflectory' and the other is a 'refectory,'" Beatrice informed the four girls, while she conducted them on a flying trip over the entire place. "The old cloisters are the reflectory and the refectory is now our living-room, a sort of dining-room and drawing-room combined."

The ancient dining-hall, however, was quite large enough for all its present purposes and could have accommodated a good-sized household with ease. The old carved black oak dining-table was lost in the vastness of the apartment. Suits of armor were ranged along the walls at intervals, and Billie was amazed to find that one or two of them were not a whit taller than she was herself. From a gallery running around two sides of the hall hung several faded battle flags. There were a few portraits on the walls of dark-haired, rather fierce-looking knights and their beguiling ladies, also dark-haired with gentle blue eyes. The only modern object in the entire room was a grand piano at the far end under a stained glass window.

"Beatrice, do we sleep in cells?" demanded Mary Price.

"Yes," answered the English girl. "There are dozens of them opening on the galleries. They are just as they were centuries ago, rather small for sleeping-

rooms, but, as Uncle says, it's quite like camping out to come up here for a visit; and the cells are much larger than tents."

"Are they haunted?" asked Mary.

Beatrice smiled mysteriously.

"People claim to have seen things," she said, "but I never did. Almost every castle in Ireland has its banshee, you know, but it only appears before a death in the family."

"And what is the banshee of Castle Abbey?" the four girls asked in an excited chorus.

"Now, if I tell you," exclaimed Beatrice, her blue eyes twinkling with fun, "you will be afraid to go to bed alone, and you know there is only one bed to a cell and it's a very small bed indeed!"

"Oh, please, please tell!" they cried.

"Well," said Beatrice, "the banshee of Castle Abbey isn't anybody at all. It's a noise——"

"A what?"

"It's a bell and it rings to announce an approaching death in the family."

"Where is the bell?"

"It is in the belfry of the old tower. But there is simply no way to climb to the top if anybody wanted to. No one can remember when steps have been there."

"Did you ever hear it?" asked Mary.

"No, indeed, and I hope I never shall, but the night Grandpapa died in London, old Michael, the gardener, claims to have heard it ring out three times."

It all sounded very remote and interesting to the four young Americans, who had been brought up in a place that did not antedate a hundred years, and still had once seemed old enough to them.

"Why don't they take down the bell?" asked Mary.

"Oh, there's a superstition about that, too, and an old verse:

"'*The hour the iron bell doth fall*
Brings trouble to Kilkenty Hall;
If hatred turns to love before,
Trouble will not cross the door.'"

"What does that mean?" inquired Mary.

"Nobody has any more idea than you have. It is just an old saying that has always been connected with the bell. Kilkenty Hall, you know, is the home of my other uncle, the Duke. You see, the Hall always goes to the eldest son and the Abbey to the second son for his lifetime."

"Suppose there isn't any second son?" persisted Mary.

"But there always has been," laughed Beatrice.

"Then little Arthur will be master of the Abbey some day," thought Billie, but as Beatrice had kept well away from the subject of her lost cousin, the girls were careful not to mention his name. Billie's mind was filled with vague suspicions and conjectures still too lost in the mists of uncertainty to put into words. Suppose, for instance, she sought out the terrible Duke of Kilkenty and told him—well, what would she tell him? Would it be a friendly act to bring certain disaster on the heads of probably innocent people just because she had seen a pair of small-sized man's slippers and a child's book of animals in a tenement house room in Edinburgh? Wherever little Arthur was, no doubt he was happier than he had ever been before.

All these thoughts were flying through her head, while she sipped her tea in the old garden late that afternoon. After tea, the five young girls went for a walk, Miss Campbell repaired to her room for a nap, and Maria and Lord Glenarm remained in the garden chatting.

In the valley back of the Abbey, Beatrice pointed out to them Kilkenty Hall, which was comparatively modern, having been burned to the ground and rebuilt within the last hundred years. Because it was like walking on a soft carpet to step on the springy turf and because also the air was cool and sweet, the friends joined hands and ran down the hillside laughing and shrieking at the tops of their voices. At the foot, following a path through a woodland, they presently came out near a little village, picturesque enough at a distance, but wretched in the extreme on closer view.

"These are the tenants of the Hall," Beatrice explained. "The Duke has always detested Ireland and he won't do anything for his Irish tenants."

"What a shame," exclaimed Billie. Everything she heard of this man painted him in more detestable colors.

As Beatrice led the way down the village street, ragged women and children, barefooted and unkempt, bobbed and courtesied to her. The alley, for it was hardly broader than one, widened at length into a broad sweep of green, on one side of which stood a very old church and, adjoining that, a small stone cottage in a garden. A priest was standing at the garden gate intently watching three men at work on the green with a measuring line and surveyor's instruments.

"Good-day to you, my lady," cried the old priest, whose jovial round face was wreathed in smiles. "And have you or your uncle heard some of the good news that's floating about the valley this day?"

"Why, no, Father O'Toole, what is it?" asked Beatrice surprised.

"Thanks be to God and all his holy saints, our prayers have been answered, and His Grace is turning the green into a new model village for his tenants.

There's to be a schoolhouse on it, your ladyship. It's myself that has seen the plans with my own eyes, and, what is more, the church is to be rebuilt and no expense to be spared, and the rectory greatly enlarged."

"Why, Father O'Toole, I can't believe you!" cried Beatrice. "It seems too good to be true."

"'Tis true, though, my lady, and more to come. The O'Connors this very morning returned to their old home and word is out that Feargus may come back and no fear of arrest at all, at all."

Here was news, indeed, for the Motor Maids!

"But, Father O'Toole," cried Beatrice, "what has happened to His Grace?"

She had never called him uncle in all her life.

"It's maybe a penance to bring back the little Lord Arthur," said the good priest; "and I'm thinkin', too," he added in a lower voice, "the lad might be better off where he is, poor child. He wouldn't have lasted another year under that blackguard of a doctor."

The walk was cut short by the astounding news of the Duke of Kilkenty's penance. Beatrice could scarcely wait to tell it to her uncle, and the girls presently left the two together in the garden while they retired to their rooms to rest before dinner.

This formal meal was served at eight o'clock and Miss Campbell had earnestly adjured them to wear their very best, having overheard Lord Glenarm say that some of the county people were driving over for dinner.

"What luxurious lives these people lead," she had exclaimed to Billie, "and they call themselves poor! Think of their servants and their housekeepers and their grand old homes. I suppose our little American homes are like so many rabbit holes to them after their fine castles and their grand city mansions."

"There are plenty of little rabbit holes over here, too," answered Billie, recalling the abode of Miss Felicia Rivers and the rickety houses in the Old Town at Edinburgh.

But who could think of rabbit holes at eight o'clock that evening, when with fluttering hearts the Motor Maids peeped over the balcony and saw below the great table, shining with silver and damask, on one side of a long screen always set up for meals, and on the other side some half dozen new guests added to the party? There was Beatrice in a simple white muslin, talking and laughing with a ruddy-faced, delightful young man with a budding mustache; there was Lord Glenarm, looking every inch the nobleman he was, conversing easily with the mother of the ruddy-faced young person; and there was Maria Cortinas, beautiful enough to be any lord's lady, surrounded by a circle of admiring people.

Was it all a dream, they asked themselves. Were they really four humble little West Haven High School girls on a tour of the British Isles? And was that

Maria, the daughter of old Mrs. Ruggles, who kept the Sailor's Inn near West Haven? But it was all real enough, indeed, and presently Billie found herself seated next to a jovial gentleman with side whiskers who asked her a hundred questions about their motor trip across the continent. It seemed that their fame had gone before them, and the four girls were the objects of much polite and well-bred curiosity.

It was midnight before the last carriage departed. Then, each with a bedroom candlestick, they filed along the ghostly corridor to bed.

"I am that tired that the ghosts of the good fathers, if they walk to-night, will have to make a lot of noise to wake me up," thought Billie, stretching herself in the comfortable little bed. "What would the monks think if they could see their cells now," her thoughts continued, "with curtains at the windows and rugs on the floors and every other cell turned into a luxurious dressing-room? They would say '*vanitas vanitatum*,' I suppose."

Then she sank into a deep sleep.

As the night wore on and the darkness outside deepened, because the moon had set and the sky was overcast, Billie had a dream. She thought that one of the good fathers was leading her by the hand through the long corridors, across the garden and into the ruined chapel on the other side. Many monks were in the church, chanting in a deep chorus over and over again the same words: "*Vanitas vanitatum.*" The wind howled and the air was damp and chill. Suddenly one of the monks held up his hand for silence; they crouched on their knees and a bell boomed out in the stillness.

Billie was wide awake in an instant. She sat up in bed and listened. The ancient abbey was filled with ghostly sounds. The rain beat against the window and the wind howled mournfully. It seemed to be saying "*Vanitas vanitatum.*"

"That's what I thought was the chanting of the monks," she said to herself. "I suppose I had one of my usual nightmares."

Back under the covers she crept, glad of the warmth and comfort after that gruesome dream.

CHAPTER XXIV.—WHEN HATRED TURNS TO LOVE.

The smiling summer landscape showed not a sign next morning of the disturbances of the night before. The rain-washed foliage glistened in the sunshine, and far below in the valley curled a ribbon of blue, hazy smoke. Billie, greatly refreshed from the sleep which had come to her after the storm, had almost forgotten the nightmare until the ringing of a bell in the distance brought it to mind. She touched an electric button, as she had been directed to do by Beatrice, and presently a pretty Irish maid appeared carrying a tray on which was a glass of hot milk. A few minutes later she reappeared with a small basin of hot water. Billie wondered if this was to be her allowance. Probably in an ancient abbey hot water was scarce. But it was only a sample upon which she was to pass judgment.

"It's quite right, thank you," she said, testing the temperature with the tip of her finger. Next there was a sound of water being poured into a tub in the dressing-room and she was aware that the bath was prepared. Leaning back on the pillows she sipped her milk comfortably.

"My, but this is luxury," she thought. "*Vanitas vanitatum* for a fact."

"Your bath is ready, Miss," announced the girl, pausing irresolutely.

"Did you want to say anything, Bridget?" asked Billie, noticing that the maid lingered in the doorway.

"Bad luck has come to us this day, Miss, and may the Saints preserve us all."

"Why, what is it?"

"The owld i-ron bell rang in the night, Miss, and then toombled down to the ground and broke itself in half, and shure the owld sayin's come thrue already—

"'The hour the i-ron bell doth fall
Brings throuble to Kilkenty Hall.'

"His Grace, the Duke, Miss, toombled downstairs in the night and they found him this morning stiff and stark as a corpse——"

"Dead?" asked Billie in a shocked voice.

"No, 'twas not dead he was, Miss, but unconscious-like. He must have hit his head when he fell and lay there most of the night. Wurra! Wurra! and it's bad luck that's come to him, surely, and he with no toime to ask for forgiveness of the Blessed Lord. 'Tis mony a mass will be said for the sowl of His Grace, and he a-callin' for his youngest, and a-givin' to the poor and needy for his safe return. He's a changed man, Miss, the servants at the Hall do be a-tellin' me. 'Twas only yesterday mornin' he asked Patrick, the head gardener, how his wife did as was mother to twins last week."

Billie could scarcely keep from smiling. Was it so wonderful for His Grace to make a kind inquiry?

"He was nivver known to ask the loike before, Miss, but it may be he felt

the bad luck a-comin' on like a disease, and his little boy, as he once was cold to, kept a-hauntin' him day and night. The little Lord Arthur is dead, Miss. I'm as sure of that as I'm standin' on my two feet here. 'Twas only yestiddy a black cat crossed my path twice. 'Tis a sign of death, surely, and his father will follow him to the grave as certain as the owld bell fell last night and broke into pieces."

Nothing can yield more readily to superstitious influence than the Irish temperament. While the educated classes attempt to resist it, the ignorant are an easy prey to signs and indications. Billie felt that she herself might easily absorb some of it, if she lingered in the land for any length of time. It was a strange coincidence, however, the Duke's tumbling downstairs the very night the old bell had broken from its fastenings and fallen to the ground! But of course the corrosion of time,—goodness only knows how many centuries,—had loosened the stones in the tower, and the great storm had finished the work of destruction. You couldn't expect an old ruin to stand forever, and Billie was later to find that half the tower had blown down with the bell. As for the Duke, perhaps he wasn't as badly injured as Bridget had said. She was glad he wanted little Arthur at last. Here Billie's thoughts gave a flying leap across a broad gulf of conjecture and landed safely on the other side. In fact, her methods of reasoning and arriving at conclusions were very much like a rider on a fast horse leaping hurdles. While she dressed, suspicions that for weeks had lurked in the dark corners of her mind became convictions, and by the time she was ready to join her friends at breakfast, she had arrived at a determination.

Lord Glenarm was nowhere about at breakfast, which in an English house is an informal meal. The guests serve themselves from "hot water dishes" or from platters of cold meat, if they want any; and most assuredly these young Americans did not yearn for cold meat at breakfast.

Beatrice, somewhat pale and frightened, was telling the others what had occurred when Billie joined them.

"How he escaped concussion of the brain is a miracle," she said, "but he's resting comfortably now, only he keeps asking for little Arthur. Uncle has ridden over to the Hall."

It had been a long time since uncle had ridden over to the Hall or had anything whatever to do with his half-brother; but stranger things than this were to happen at Kilkenty Hall.

Miss Campbell immediately suggested departing with her four charges, but Maria, who had seen their host before he left, told them that Lord Glenarm particularly requested them to remain.

The two older women, therefore, went out for a morning drive, and the younger ones took a spin in the "Comet." This was what Billie especially wished, and when they stopped in a pretty village some miles distant to shop, she in-

quired the way to the telegraph office, and slipping away from the others, sent a mysterious telegram to Telemac Kalisch. She remembered the address perfectly even to the number of the room in "the seventh heaven," and she breathed a sigh of relief now the thing was off her mind.

"It may lead to nothing at all and it may lead to a great deal. Who knows?" she thought.

All the afternoon she waited anxiously for an answer. Telegrams to the Abbey were telephoned over from the village, she had been informed, and she made an excuse not to walk with the others before tea, and sat in the great refectory reading a book. Her chair was drawn near an open window through which floated the perfume of the flowers on the terraced lawn and the soft stir made by the breeze in the tree tops. Billie closed her eyes and rested her cheek against the high tapestry back of the chair. For the hundredth time that afternoon she was endeavoring to persuade herself that she had done right. If she were entirely on the wrong track, how could she ever explain to Mr. Kalisch? So she was thinking when something fluttered onto her lap. She opened her eyes languidly, thinking perhaps a stray leaf had floated in on the breeze, and lo and behold, there was the message! Not to this day does she know how it reached her. Probably through the window, but just as probably in some other way. It was merely a scrap of paper and scrawled across it in an uneducated handwriting was: "Your message received. Be in the garden to-morrow at five."

She sat a long time staring at the paper until the voices of the others broke in on her reverie. Then she rolled it into a little ball and tossed it out of the window.

"I can't understand," she said. "It's too deep for me."

"Well, you did miss it by not coming," cried Nancy, dashing into the room excitedly, her arms filled with roses. "We have been over to Kilkenty Hall—think of that! The housekeeper showed us all over the house. There's a picture gallery and a grand ballroom and a beautiful boudoir all hung in pink brocade. Beatrice saw her uncle and he kissed her, the first time since she was a child, she said; and he didn't fall in the hall at all, but down a flight of steps leading to the chapel, where he had gone to pray."

"Dear me," exclaimed Billie, "I never heard such an interesting mixture of news in all my life. You'll be telling me His Grace kissed you next."

"He didn't, but he ordered the head gardener to take us through the hot houses——"

"Conservatories, child," corrected Billie.

"And we came away simply laden with flowers. These are Killarney roses. Mary chose white roses and Elinor took pink carnations."

Undoubtedly a wonderful change had come over the Duke of Kilkenty and

his whole nature appeared to be transformed.

It was not easy for Billie to conceal from the watchful eye of Miss Campbell and the girls the tremendous secret that she must keep to herself until five o'clock the next afternoon. It was an anxious and uneasy time for her. Suppose Beatrice should arrange to take them off somewhere at that hour, she thought. Suppose there should be visitors to tea in the garden; suppose it should be raining; suppose a hundred things. The weary minutes stretched themselves into hours and the hours became interminably long, it seemed to her, before the time even approached five o'clock the next day. The strain of waiting was almost more than she could endure alone. At last, after an endless time of playing tennis and walking and visiting the kennels and doing fifty other things, the five girls repaired to the Abbey garden, where Miss Campbell and Maria sat talking with Lord Glenarm and—was it possible?—the Duke of Kilkenty, himself. He was pale and his head was bandaged, but he insisted on rising and being duly presented to the four agitated young Americans. Did he recall the five pounds and the angry beast Feargus had killed? They could not tell. He was extremely courteous and there was a kindly light in his eyes that reassured them. Billie sat down limply in a chair and waited. Some one gave her a cup of tea which she forgot to drink. Her eyes were fastened on the ivy-grown arch in the wall of the ruins, and all the time a little figure was approaching slowly along the garden walk from the other end.

It was Beatrice who first called out with much excitement:

"Why, who is that?"

Everybody looked up and the Duke of Kilkenty cried:

"Arthur! Arthur!"

"Papa, have you cut your head?" demanded the little boy, who was strangely familiar and yet unfamiliar, and the next minute he was in their midst and they were all laughing and embracing him at once.

It was some time before they could realize that the pale, delicate Arthur was a sturdy, beautiful boy. His face was tanned to a healthy brown and his eyes were clear and merry.

"Where have you been all this time, Arthur?" demanded his father, lifting him onto a bench and gazing at him with the expression of one who has made a wonderful and happy discovery.

"I've been with grandpapa," answered Arthur. The half-brothers exchanged a long look. "Grandpapa and Marie-Jeanne. We have had such ripping times. We played out of doors every day and I never had to study at all. Marie-Jeanne knows more games than Grandpapa, even. And she can make little cakes. I have been very happy, but Grandpapa said you wanted me and you loved me now——"

The Duke stroked the little boy's head and looked down.

"I should think he might feel a trifle uncomfortable," thought Miss Campbell, still a bit skeptical over the Duke's complete reformation.

"And Grandpapa said that Billie sent word I was to come home and it was all right."

"Who's Billie?"

"My best girl," answered Arthur, running over and leaning against the blushing Billie's shoulder with entire confidence.

Then she was obliged to explain what she had done. His Grace was much moved. He pressed her hand and said she was a remarkable young woman, and that she had done what the highest paid detectives in the kingdom had been unable to accomplish, and he wished to thank her with all his heart.

Thus five o'clock merged into six, and six into half past, and at last His Grace took his little son away, leaving the others still in the garden feeling quite as if they had been taking part in a play.

All this time Billie wondered where Marie-Jeanne was, but she never came and they have never seen her from that day to this. However, she has written to Billie several long happy letters. She and her mother had a little home on the bank of the river near Oxford, she said, and besides her household duties, she was studying history and French.

That night, after dinner, Beatrice and Billie walked arm in arm in the moonlit garden.

"Billie," began Beatrice, "uncle says that since you were cleverer than all the detectives and really found little Arthur, you have a right to know something, and he has given me permission to tell you."

"Is it about Telemac Kalisch?"

"I suppose you know him by that name. He is really Arthur's great-grandfather, and the grandfather of Maddelina, my uncle's second wife. But he is many more things besides and we are quite afraid of him, although uncle has met him and says he is charming."

"He is," said Billie, "but what is the mystery about him?"

"He is supposed to be at the head of a great secret society. It's everywhere, all over the world, and it's for poor people,—socialistic, uncle calls it,—but it has members in all classes and it's to establish peace. Of course, it's not actually known that the society exists, and if it does, how far it goes and what it actually does. It's only supposed. Uncle says that there is no telling who belongs, perhaps some of his own servants for all he knows. At any rate, Mr. Kalisch is a very marvelous old man. No one knows his age, but Uncle once heard he was very, very old, but that he doesn't believe in age or in illness. He has all kinds of queer theories and he has friends in all classes, princes and common people. He isn't afraid of anything in the world. Uncle said long ago that His Grace, as

we always used to call Uncle Max, had better be careful. Old Telemac loved his granddaughter, and he would certainly have an eye on little Arthur."

"It's all very queer," said Billie, deeply interested in the history of the strange old man.

The two girls followed the walk leading to the other side of the ruined chapel, where stood the half-demolished tower, and Billie told Beatrice the dream she had had the night of the storm, and how she had heard the bell ring out once, probably as it fell.

"The queerest part of it all is," observed Beatrice, "that the old prophecy did come true in a way:

"'If hatred turns to love before
Trouble will not cross the door.'

"Uncle and I thought of it, you may be sure. If Uncle Max had not repented when he did, he would surely have had concussion of the brain or some awful thing."

Billie smiled.

"Do you believe that?" she asked. "It was just a coincidence, of course."

"Call it whatever you like. It did come out just as the old rhyme said it would," answered Beatrice. "I could tell you queerer things than this that have happened to some of the old families in Ireland and England."

"But what made him repent, Beatrice?" asked Billie.

"Who can tell what makes such things happen? Perhaps he suddenly saw himself as he really was; or perhaps he had a vision. It has happened before in this family. They do say that the ancestor who built this old abbey was a wild and lawless character and he reformed and entered a monastery, and then he built the abbey as a monument of his repentance, I suppose."

"What would he think of it now, I wonder?" thought Billie.

It was growing late and the two girls turned back and presently joined their friends in the refectory.

Before the Motor Maids and Miss Campbell left Ireland, they received a call one morning from Feargus O'Connor, whose round, good-natured face now beamed with happiness. He and his family had been able to return to their old home, he said; his mother now had a deed to the place and there would never again be any disputes about the title. He himself had been appointed First Officer on a merchant ship. Some day he would be Captain of the ship, but for the present he was well content to sail the high seas as First Officer.

Billie would have liked to clear up some of the mystery about Telemac Kalisch, but she hesitated to question Feargus. That the Duke of Kilkenty had been known as "Tweedledum" in that mysterious association, and that Feargus

had been chosen to kidnap the little Lord Arthur and had refused, she was fairly certain. Like as not, he had not learned until later that old Telemac was the grandfather of the boy.

One more incident remains to be told before we close the history of the Motor Maids' travels in the British Isles. At a grand farewell dinner at Kilkenty Hall, His Grace, the Duke, made an appropriate speech of thanks and presented Billie with a beautiful enamelled brooch in the design of a wreath of roses, shamrocks and thistles intertwined.

So ended the strange drama into which the Motor Maids had been unwittingly drawn. It had, however, enabled them to see many sides of life; to touch the edge of a vast secret movement for universal peace; to see the miracle of hatred turned to love and wrong made right. The most unpleasant memories connected with their trip were softened by the happy ending they had somehow brought about.

When they journey abroad again, they will sail to the faraway land of Japan, and then we may, if we will, join "THE MOTOR MAIDS IN FAIR JAPAN."

THE END.

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