

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS BY THE BLUE
LAGOON

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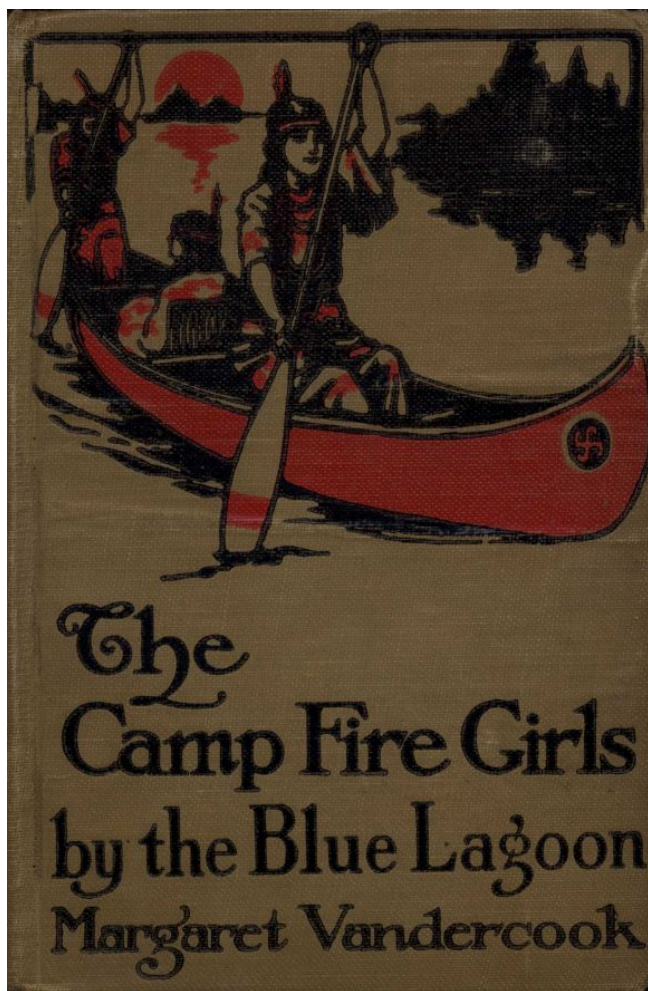
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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS
BY THE BLUE LAGOON ***

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THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS BY



The
Camp Fire Girls
by the Blue Lagoon
Margaret Vandercook

Cover art



Gill Rejoined Him and Was Attempting to Fix Her Hair

THE BLUE LAGOON

BY
MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls" Series, "The Red
Cross Girls" Series, etc.

ILLUSTRATED

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STORIES ABOUT CAMP FIRE GIRLS

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- The Camp Fire Girls at Sunrise Hill
- The Camp Fire Girls Amid the Snows
- The Camp Fire Girls in the Outside World
- The Camp Fire Girls Across the Sea
- The Camp Fire Girls' Careers
- The Camp Fire Girls an After Years
- The Camp Fire Girls at the Edge of the Desert
- The Camp Fire Girls at the End of the Trail
- The Camp Fire Girls Behind the Lines

The Camp Fire Girls on the Field of Honor
The Camp Fire Girls in Glorious France
The Camp Fire Girls in Merrie England
The Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake
The Camp Fire Girls by the Blue Lagoon

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The Camp Fire Girls by the Blue Lagoon

CHAPTER I THE CITY OF TOWERS

One afternoon in October two girls were walking down Fifth Avenue. They were strangers in New York. One of them, a tall, fair girl, dressed in a dark blue tailor suit, furs, and a close-fitting velvet hat, was several years older than her companion, who was small with dark eyes, a sallow skin and an oddly unconventional appearance which seemed to accord with her costume, a brown serge cape, a

gown of the same material and an old-fashioned poke bonnet of flowered silk.

In another hour the shops would close and the crowds come pouring forth into the streets.

"Are you tired, Elce? I had forgotten you were never in New York save the one day when you landed. The hotel is only a few blocks further on, yet perhaps it might have been wiser not to have attempted to walk from the station."

Bettina Graham, who was carrying a small suitcase, made an effort to slacken her pace, her companion with quicker, shorter steps keeping close beside her.

"No, I am not tired," she answered, "it is only the noise that confuses me. I never could have imagined anything like it. Yet I think I once dreamed of a city like this, of tall towers and streets that are ravines between high cliffs, with the same bright blue sky overhead."

The older girl smiled.

"You are a fanciful person, but dreaming in New York is a dangerous pastime, where one must watch every foot of the way."

The afternoon was warm and brilliant, with only a faint suggestion of frost, the shop windows filled with brilliant displays, the streets crowded with automobiles.

Bettina's expression changed, her eyes shone, her lips parted slightly as the color swept into her cheeks.

"New York is fascinating, isn't it? One forgets how fascinating even when one has been away only a short time. I do hope I may be able to spend the winter here! But for you, Elce, who have lived almost your entire life in the country, it must be a wholly new experience. Well, we are both runaways this afternoon!"

"There is Mrs. Burton's hotel just around the corner of the next block. At this hour, between five and six o'clock, she must be at home."

Unconsciously Bettina began to move more rapidly, with the appearance of a runner whose goal is nearly in sight.

"I'll send up our cards and she will see us at once. I am sorry our train was two hours late. I presume I ought to have telegraphed. One does not enjoy the idea of being alone in New York." Bettina laughed. "Don't be troubled, there is not the faintest chance of such a disaster. Now that our Camp Fire guardian has returned to the stage and her play become one of the greatest successes of the winter, I suppose she does have to excuse herself to a good many persons, yet she will scarcely decline to see us."

Not talking to her companion so much as to herself, Bettina at the same time was studying the faces of the passers-by, divided between her interest in New York, the contagion of the brilliant autumn day and her undoubted nervousness over some personal problem.

Reaching the desired hotel, after an instant's hesitation, the two girls entered, Bettina feeling an unaccustomed awkwardness and embarrassment. Notwithstanding the fact that she had traveled many miles in the past few years in her own country and in Europe, this was the first occasion when she had been without a chaperon.

Declining to surrender her suitcase, Bettina asked the clerk to announce her arrival to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burton. In a measure she felt prepared to have her request refused, as Mrs. Burton would probably wish to be excused to visitors at this hour. She meant to be insistent, even if necessary to telephone her own name.

The clerk shook his head.

"Sorry, miss, but Captain and Mrs. Burton are not in; they left this hotel four or five days ago and took an apartment of their own."

"You don't mean they are no longer living here?"

To her own ears Bettina's voice sounded more startled than it should. "Then will you be kind enough to give me their new address, as I wish to find them at once."

She thought she saw a faint look of sympathy and regret on the clerk's face.

"Sorry again, but Captain Burton left strict orders their new address was to be given to no one. They do not wish to see strangers. Their friends they intend notifying themselves. Perhaps you want Mrs. Burton to help you to go on the stage, so many young women call on her for this purpose and she has been giving up so much time to them, Captain Burton does not wish her to be disturbed in the future."

Bettina flushed and frowned.

"No, I am not looking for work and I am not a stranger to Mrs. Burton. She and Captain Burton would wish you to tell me where they are living. Mrs. Burton is a kind of relative, or at least she is an intimate friend."

The clerk smiled.

"That is what everyone says. I regret not being able to oblige you, but orders are orders."

As if Bettina were no longer demanding his attention he turned to some one who had been waiting and was now inquiring for a room.

Wishing to discuss a question of great importance to her own happiness with her Camp Fire guardian, Bettina had run away from home. The act was not premeditated. When she made her sudden decision her mother and father chanced to be spending a few days away from Washington. Nor would they have objected to her journey, save to prefer that she have an older companion than the little English girl, Elce, originally known as Chitty, whom the Camp Fire girls had known during the summer in "Merrie England."

Bettina had not seen her Camp Fire guardian in six months, not since their parting at Half Moon Lake. Of late, not once, but many times her mother had announced that she would like the benefit of Polly Burton's advice on the question which divided them.

So Bettina suddenly had set out on her pilgrimage to New York with this end in view. To arrive unheralded and not find Mrs. Burton, to be compelled to spend the night with Elce as her only companion would but deepen her mother's impression that she possessed neither the judgment nor experience necessary for the independence she desired.

Nothing would be gained by looking inside her pocket book. She knew exactly the amount of money it contained.

After paying for her own and Elce's tickets and an expensive lunch on the train she had counted it carefully. Seven dollars and forty cents then had seemed a sufficient amount when she expected to be with her Camp Fire guardian in a few hours; it was woefully insufficient to meet the expenses of two persons in New York.

There was one friend to whom she might appeal, but this would make her present difficulty with her mother the greater. Surely there must be some method of discovering her Camp Fire guardian, if only she were not so stupid that she had no idea what to do next. In any case she would not remain longer in the lobby of the hotel and she declined to question the clerk a third time. In the street she would receive fresh inspiration.

She and Elce left the hotel.

Outdoors no new idea immediately occurred to her. It seemed strange that her mother had not mentioned Mrs. Burton's change of address: as they never failed to write each other once a week, undoubtedly she must know. Then Bettina recalled the fact that she and her mother had had but little to say to each other of late, since no matter upon what subject they started to talk, always the conversation veered to the difference between them.

"Don't be worried, dear, I shall be able to think what to do in a few moments," Bettina remarked, with more courage than conviction. "It was ridiculous for the hotel management to decline to give me Tante's change of address. She and Captain Burton will both be annoyed; the clerk should have known they might wish some exception to be made to their order."

Elce nodded, regretting that she was unable to offer any advice and yet perfectly content to abide by Bettina's judgment. In a strange and unfamiliar world, Bettina was her one anchor. Sent to a boarding school, from loneliness and longing for the outdoors, Elce had fallen ill, and unable to continue at school, Bettina's home had been her refuge.

At present the younger girl was finding it difficult to keep her attention

concentrated upon the object of their quest, the city noises so excited and confused her. With her strange musical gift she long had been able to reproduce the country sounds, the singing of certain birds, the wind in the trees, now she seemed faintly aware of some hidden harmony amid the thousand discords of the city streets.

Again her companion brought her back from her day dreaming.

"I believe I will look in the telephone book, as it is just possible Tante may have kept her former telephone number and had it transferred to her new address. If you do not mind waiting, here is a public telephone booth."

Five minutes later with her expression a little more cheerful, Bettina rejoined the younger girl.

"I have discovered an apartment in Fifth Avenue which may be Tante's. At least it is occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burton. As no one answered the telephone, suppose we take the Fifth Avenue bus and see if by a stroke of good fortune we have located the right place. I do hope so. If not, I suppose we can find a quiet hotel and spend the night there, or if not go to a Y.W.C.A. and explain our difficulty. In the morning I fear we must return to Washington and there humbly inquire for Tante's address. I might telegraph of course, but as mother and father are not at home, to find we have vanished before they receive the letter I left for them, will annoy and frighten them. Heigh-ho, it is a puzzling world, Elce dear; when I thought I was attempting a simple journey for a good cause here I am in an entirely unexpected tangle!"

In spite of her uncertainty, for she had but little assurance of finding her guardian, Bettina could not fail to enjoy the ride up Fifth Avenue in the crowded bus. Not yet dark, still here and there lights were shining in the office buildings, while the throngs of people hurrying home grew constantly larger. The bus passed the low, classic stone building she recognized as the New York Public Library, then a group of magnificent houses and hotels and the entrance to Central Park.

At Sixty-first Street and Fifth Avenue Bettina and her companion dismounted.

Half a block further on they entered a handsome apartment building.

"Will you telephone up and ask either Mr. or Mrs. Richard Burton to see Miss Bettina Graham," Bettina asked the elevator boy. "I won't give your name, Elce; it is better that I explain later and the two names might be confusing," she whispered, more uneasy than she cared to confess even to herself.

The reply brought a flush of color to Bettina's cheeks. She was to "come up at once."

"I am afraid I am a good deal relieved. In truth I am so tired I shall tumble into bed as soon as dinner is over and not try to have a long talk with Tante before

morning. Probably she would prefer me to wait, as she will soon be leaving for the theater. I hope her apartment is not very small, but in any case she will have to find room for us to-night," Bettina managed to confide on the way up to the fifth floor.

The moment she had rung the bell, the door opened.

Bettina and Elce found themselves confronting a young man of about eighteen or nineteen years of age.

"Won't you come in? I believe you wish to see my mother. I did not catch your name, but she will be at home in a few moments. The apartment has been deserted all afternoon, but I am sure she won't be much longer away."

An absurd instant Bettina forgot her dignity and the number of her years and suffered an impulse to shed tears. She was tired and it was late. She felt the responsibility for her companion. Of course she should not have rushed to New York in this impetuous fashion without her mother's knowledge, or informing her Camp Fire guardian of her intention.

"You are very kind. I am sorry to have troubled you, but it is not your mother I am looking for. I was afraid I was making a mistake. I am seeking for another Mrs. Richard Burton and merely hoped that this might prove to be her address."

"You are convinced it is not." The young fellow's manner was so kind that Bettina felt slightly less depressed. "Suppose you tell me something of the Mrs. Burton you *do* wish to find, give me some kind of a clue and I may be able to help you."

"Well, I scarcely know how to explain. I came to New York under the impression that Mr. and Mrs. Burton were at a hotel where I know they have been for a number of months and unexpectedly learned they had moved."

"Surely you could have inquired where they have gone!"

Scarcely conscious of how cross and tired she appeared, Bettina frowned.

"Oh, of course I inquired, but the hotel clerk refused to inform me. Mrs. Burton's play this winter is a great success and I suppose so many people have called on her that she felt obliged to refuse to permit her address to be given to strangers, and I was unable to convince the clerk I was an old friend."

Bettina and Elce were about to turn away.

"Do you mean you are trying to discover the Mrs. Burton who is Polly O'Neill Burton, and is acting in the new play known as 'A Tide in the Affairs'? I saw it only a few nights ago. Why do you not go to her theater and inquire where she lives. The theater is at Forty-seventh and Broadway. If you do not receive the information you could wait until Mrs. Burton arrives. I wish you would allow my mother to go with you. If I were only another girl I might be useful. As I am not, I don't dare propose to accompany you. But there are two

of you, so I suppose you will be all right, although I don't like the idea of your going to a theater at this hour alone."

Bettina smiled, forgetting in her evident relief to be as conventional as was usual with her.

"I am very much obliged to you. I don't see why I did not think of your suggestion myself. There is no reason to trouble you any further. Of course yours is the proper solution of our difficulty, I knew there must be one if I could only discover it. Good-by and thank you."

An hour later Bettina Graham and Elce were entering an old house in Gramercy Park which recently had been made over into apartments. And within a few moments Mrs. Burton's arms were about Bettina.

"My dear, how lovely it is to see you after so long! But what has brought you here at this hour without letting me know? Surely nothing has happened to Betty or to you! You have not come to tell me your mother is ill and wants me?"

Bettina shook her head.

"No, dear, there is no reason to be uneasy. I simply wish to talk over a question with you, partly because you are my Camp Fire guardian, but more I suppose because you are yourself. I left Washington suddenly and did not think it worth while to telegraph. You see I did not dream you had moved, or that I would have any difficulty in discovering you. But let me tell you the whole story in the morning. Elce and I are tired and hungry. Can you find a place for us?"

"Don't be absurd, Bettina. Think, dear, I have not seen one of my Camp Fire girls in six months! Come and let us find Richard, he is in the drawing-room; then we will have dinner as I must be off to the theater soon afterwards. We can have a long, uninterrupted talk after breakfast tomorrow."

CHAPTER II

THE GENERATIONS

At ten o'clock the next morning Bettina and Mrs. Burton were in her small sitting-room with the door closed.

The room was characteristic of its owner—filled with warm, soft colors in shades of rose and blue, a few beautiful pieces of furniture, a few photographs, two exquisite paintings on the wall.

In a large chair before the fire, with a small table drawn up beside her,

Mrs. Burton had just finished breakfast and was reading her mail, while Bettina wandered about examining the rosewood desk, the pictures, dipping her nose into a blue bowl filled with violets which had arrived not a quarter of an hour before and which Bettina herself had arranged.

"I have a letter from your mother, Princess; she is not writing from Washington and has not yet heard you are with me. However, she says she wishes that we could have a talk together," Mrs. Burton remarked, dropping into the fanciful title the Camp Fire girls had bestowed upon Bettina Graham years before, and which they now only used occasionally.

"Come and make your confession, dear, for besides being by nature curious I can't help being troubled. Surely, Bettina, you have not been falling in love with some one whom your mother does not approve! If so, I am going to be equally difficult. When I became your Camp Fire guardian long ago, and you were all small girls, I never considered the responsibilities that your growing up would thrust upon me, and have often thought of resigning the honor since."

Bettina came and stood before the fire with her hands clasped in front of her and looking down at the older woman, who was gazing up at her half smiling and half frowning.

"I don't see what especial difference your resigning as our Camp Fire guardian would make, Tante. We would all continue to come to you with our problems and you would be wounded and offended should we choose any one else. It is true most of us are growing rather old for the Camp Fire, and yet it has become so important a part of our lives no one of us would dream of giving it up. By the way, you are looking wonderfully well, as if your work were agreeing with you better than I thought possible."

"Yes, I am well, thank you. Is it so difficult to confide what you came to New York to tell me? I don't like to think of your search for me yesterday and the possibility that you might not have found me. When Captain Burton, believing I was seeing too many people, left the order at the hotel I was afraid that some one might come seeking me whom I should regret missing. Won't you sit down?"

Bettina shook her head.

"No, I would rather not. Somehow it is harder to begin my story than I dreamed! You see, I want so much to have you feel as I do about what I am going to tell you, since it means my whole life, and yet I am dreadfully afraid you won't. As you know, mother and I have disagreed about many small matters since I was a little girl. I was obstinate, I suppose, and she never has wholly recovered from her disappointment that I am so unlike her in my disposition and tastes. In the past father and I have seemed to understand each other, until now when he too is not in sympathy with me. Oh, I realize I am coming to my point slowly, but you must let me try and tell you in my own fashion. You care so much for mother I

fear your affection for her may prejudice you against me.”

”Isn’t that a strange speech, Bettina, as if I did not care for you as well, and as if there could be any division of interest between your mother and you?”

The Camp Fire guardian spoke slowly, studying Bettina closely. More than she realized, in the past six months Bettina had changed; she looked older and more serious and did not appear in especially good health. She had grown thinner. Under her eyes were shadows and about her lips discontented lines.

With the first suggestion of criticism her manner had altered.

Years before when Bettina was much younger, during the first months as Sunrise Camp Fire guardian, Mrs. Burton had not understood Bettina’s reserve, the little coldness which made her apparently express less affection than the other girls. Later, when this proved to be more shyness than coldness, she had come to believe that, although Bettina did not care for many persons, her affections were deep and abiding and that between them lay a friendship as strong as was possible between a girl and a so much older woman.

”Yes, Bettina has altered more than I dreamed,” she reflected.

”I am sorry to hear you say, Tante, that mother and I cannot have an interest apart, because that is exactly what has occurred,” Bettina announced. ”We have differed, we do still differ upon a question of such importance that I doubt if our old relation can ever be exactly the same. Of course I care for mother as much as I ever cared, although she declines to believe it. She already has said that her affection for me is not the same.”

”Nonsense, Bettina,” Mrs. Burton answered. ”Please tell me what you mean more clearly and be prepared to have me frank with you. If you feel you will be angry unless I agree with you, my opinion will not be of value.”

”Oh, I am accustomed to everybody’s being frank in their disapproval of me whenever they hear what I wish to do. I do not expect you to agree with me, Tante, but I did hope you would listen to my side of the question and not think me altogether selfish and inconsiderate, which is the family point of view at present.”

In Bettina’s manner there was a subtle change, her tone less self-assured, her expression showing more appeal and less challenge.

In the same instant Mrs. Burton appreciated that to fail Bettina now was to fail Bettina’s mother as well, even to end the long friendship upon which they both depended. Beneath Bettina’s assumption of hardness and wilfulness, she was sincerely troubled. Moreover, she was facing some decision vital to her future.

”Come and sit down beside me, dear, you look so tall and old towering above me. And suppose we do not presume in the beginning that we are going to misunderstand each other. You want to confide in me and I am glad you do;

now go on and I shall not interrupt.”

At the change in her Camp Fire guardian’s manner, Bettina’s face softened, she seemed younger and gentler. Sitting down on a low chair she leaned forward, placing her clasped hands in the older woman’s lap and gazing directly at her with eyes that were clear and gallant, even if they were a little obstinate and cold.

Mrs. Burton experienced a sensation of relief. In Bettina’s opposition to her mother there could be nothing seriously wrong.

She began to speak at once:

”Perhaps my confession is not so dreadful as you fear, Tante. The unfortunate thing is that mother and I cannot seem to agree and that we have argued the question so many times until of late we have not only argued but quarreled. Well, I shall begin at the beginning! When we said good-by to one another at Tahawus cabin, [*] I remained at home in Washington for only a few weeks and then mother and I opened our summer house. We both wrote you that she and father and Tony and Marguerite Arnot and I spent several perfect months together motoring and sailing and swimming with one another and with the people who came to see us. David Hale came now and then, and Tony’s college friends, besides Washington friends and Sally and Alice Ashton for a few days. There was only one small difficulty. I became intimate with an older woman who was boarding not far away. Mother did not consider her particularly desirable. She was polite to her as she is to most people and did not really object to Miss Merton until she began to feel that she was having more influence over me than she liked. Miss Merton is a settlement worker and used to tell me of her life and the people she is thrown with and the help she is able to give them. I found the account of her work very fascinating, until mother began to feel I was neglecting my family and preferring Miss Merton’s society. This was not true; I did not care so much for Miss Merton herself, although I do admire her. It was her experiences among the poor which interested me so keenly; the clubs and classes and the nursing and the effort to teach our immigrants more of the spirit and opportunities of the United States.”

[*] See ”Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake”.

”Yes, I know, my dear, social settlement work is not a new discovery. Was it to you? What in the world can this have to do with you? Surely your mother did not oppose your friendship with this Miss Merton to such an extent that you have made a tragedy of it!”

”No, of course not. What happened was just this. I became so interested in social settlement work that I have decided it is the work to which I wish to devote my life. I thought over the question for weeks and then I spoke to mother. I told her that I could not possibly do what she desired for me and make my *début* in Washington society this winter. The very idea makes me wretched! I assured her she could not realize what an utter waste of time a society life appears to me.

Besides, I am not in any way fitted for it. I asked her to allow me to spend this winter studying social settlement work. Then if I found I could be useful I would choose it as my life work. You know I never have felt that I wished to marry and for the last two years, when we were not busy with the reconstruction work in France I have been more restless than any one realized. I must find my own road, yet I did not know in what direction it lay."

"Yes, well, go on, Bettina," Mrs. Burton urged, smiling a little inwardly and yet conscious of Bettina's immense seriousness, which made her egotism pardonable.

"Well, mother at first simply declined to pay any attention to what I told her. Afterwards when she began to see that I was in earnest she declined to have me mention the subject to her again. She announced that her plans were made; I was to make my *début* early in October and to spend the winter at home. She declared that social settlement work should be left to older people and to girls who had fewer opportunities. She said other things of course, but the important fact is that she refuses to permit me the choice of my own life. Because she cares for society and people and being beautiful and admired is no reason why I should care for the same things. If I were older I should do as I like. Miss Merton has charge of a settlement house on the east side in New York and would take me in to live with her."

Bettina put up her hands to her flushed cheeks.

"I suppose this sounds as if I did not care in the least for what mother wishes, and yet I do. I am sorry to disappoint her; I wish I had been what she desired. Yet I cannot for that reason change my own nature and my own inclinations. Do please say something, Tante; it is not like you to remain silent so long."

"I did not wish to interrupt you and I am feeling sorry for Betty."

"Sorry for mother? Of course I expected you would be; everybody is sorry for her. They always have been sorry that she should have a daughter who has neither her beauty, nor charm, nor sweetness; the fact that I am a failure in society and wish to lead my own life is only one thing more. You need not for a moment suppose that the sympathy is not all with mother. I regret having troubled you. I thought when you were a girl your family and friends were bitterly opposed to your going on the stage and that regardless of them you did the thing you wished. But you are a genius and have proved your right to do as you like. I understand that makes all the difference in the world. It even justifies sacrificing other people."

Hurt and angry, and not sure of her own position, Bettina felt the common impulse to strike at some one else. The moment after her final speech she was sorry to have made it.

"Have I sacrificed other people to have my own way, Bettina? I wonder? If you mean that I returned to the stage in opposition to Aunt Patricia's wish, it is true," Mrs. Burton answered.

"You would not have referred to this had you known how unhappy it has made me. Since we parted at Tahawus cabin Aunt Patricia has never spoken to me or answered one of my letters. She has not allowed me to see her, although I have been twice to Boston for no other purpose. Yet, Bettina, are the circumstances the same? I do not wish to hurt Aunt Patricia, but I am not a girl by many years, and I chose my profession long ago. I explained that my husband and I needed the money I am able to make and could not continue to accept Aunt Patricia's generosity. She has no real objection to my return to the stage except the mistaken notion that I'm not strong enough and the fact that she cannot allow me to do what her will opposes. Dear Aunt Patricia is nothing, if not an autocrat! Still there are hours when I miss her so much, when it hurts to have her believe me ungrateful, until I almost regret what I have done, pleased as I am at the success of my new play. I often wish I had tried more persuasion with Aunt Patricia. But, Bettina, I never claimed to be a model person, and as you seem to feel I have no right to judge you, suppose we do not discuss your difficulty."

Flushing Bettina bit her lips and lowered her lids over her grey eyes.

"I don't wonder you say that, Tante, and I deserve it. To be rude to you does not help my cause, does it? Certainly it would not with mother. Besides you know I thoroughly approved of your return to the stage and think Aunt Patricia utterly unreasonable. There isn't any likeness between my position and yours in this instance. What I want you to do is to try and think how you felt when you were a girl and all your family and friends opposed your going on the stage. Didn't they tell you that you were selfish and unreasonable and breaking people's hearts from sheer obstinacy? I don't wish to be disagreeable, I have no great talent as you have, I just want you to try to feel a little sympathy for me, even if you feel more for mother."

The Camp Fire guardian smiled and shook her head, yet laid her hand on Bettina's.

"My dear, you are making a more difficult request than you realize. It is so hard to go back to one's past that most of us only understand our own generation. You Camp Fire girls should have taught me more wisdom! Of course I sympathize with you if you are unhappy, Bettina, and feel yourself in the wrong place, yet I am sorrier for your mother, because you cannot possibly realize how much you are hurting her. She never has believed you cared for her deeply and now that you are not willing to spend even one season with her in doing what she wishes, she is the more firmly convinced that you have no affection for her. You talk a great deal of not having your mother's beauty and charm; well, perhaps not

in the same degree; but Betty, I know, is very proud of you and thinks you are infinitely cleverer than she and that you feel this yourself."

"Tante, you are not fair," Bettina interrupted.

"Then perhaps you would rather I would not go on."

"Yes, I want to know what you think, only what you have said is absurd. Mother never has been proud of me, although this is scarcely her fault. She agrees with me that I am not a success in society, only she insists that this is because I won't try to make myself popular."

"Do you try?"

"Well, no, not especially, but why should I? If I were allowed to do what I like, to give all my energy and the little knowledge I possess to help people less fortunate than I am, I should try as I have never tried to accomplish anything in my life."

"You are not willing to make any effort to fulfill your mother's wish. Suppose we do not discuss the subject, Bettina, any further at present. We are both tired. I telegraphed your mother last night and am writing to-day to ask if you may make me a visit."

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Burton arose.

"I told you I did not wish to be disturbed," she protested when the door opened and another girl entered.

This girl possessed an apparently colorless manner and personality, she had ash-brown hair and eyes and the question of her appearance would scarcely occur to any one who knew her but slightly. Juliet Temple was not a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire. She had been introduced to the Camp Fire guardian and the group of girls by Mrs. Burton's husband during the winter they had spent together in the Adirondacks.

Not popular with the rest of the household, Juliet Temple had continued to live with Mrs. Burton in a position a little difficult to describe. Treated as a member of the family, she was useful to Mrs. Burton in a variety of ways, in fact she had come to depend upon her far more than she appreciated.

"Yes, I understood that you did not desire to be disturbed, but I think when you know who wishes to see you that you will feel differently," Juliet said quietly.

Accepting the cards that were offered her, Mrs. Burton exclaimed:

"Bettina, you cannot guess who has arrived, unless you have arranged to surprise me! Not to have seen one of you Camp Fire girls in all these months and now to have four of you appear at the same time scarcely seems accidental."

Bettina got up.

"I don't know what you mean!"

The Camp Fire guardian disappeared.

A moment later, returning to her sitting-room she was accompanied by

three girls, one of them a tall girl with dusky black hair and eyes and a foreign appearance in spite of the fact that she was an American.

The other two girls were sisters, although utterly unlike in appearance; one of them was tall and slightly angular with gray eyes and reddish hair. The younger girl had golden brown hair and eyes, was small and softly rounded. Her expression at the moment was one of demure happiness.

"Vera Lagerloff, Alice Ashton and Sally Ashton, at your service, Bettina," the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian announced with a curtsey.

"But, Bettina Graham, how in the world do you happen to be in New York at this time?"

Bettina laughed.

"That is exactly the question I was about to ask of you."

CHAPTER III

FUTURE PLANS

"We are spending the winter in New York; actually I have been intending to write you for weeks, Bettina, but have been too busy; Alice and I are taking special courses at Columbia and Sally is here keeping house for us," Vera Lagerloff answered.

"Have I talked so much, Tante, that you have had no opportunity to tell me so important a piece of news?" Bettina inquired.

After finding chairs for her guests, Mrs. Burton had seated herself on a couch beside Sally Ashton. She now shook her head.

"No, Bettina, I could not have told you, since I had no idea the girls were in New York. You see, they have never before been to see me or let me hear where they were. Have you been in town long?"

There was a short, uncomfortable silence.

"About a month; but please let me explain," Alice Ashton said, seeing that the other girls were waiting for her to assume the responsibility of a reply. "I realize this must seem strange to you, and I grant you it does look odd, as if we had lost all our affection and gratitude. And yet you can not believe this of us!"

"I have made no accusation," the Camp Fire guardian returned, yet in her tone and manner there was an unconscious accusation, which made it difficult for Alice to continue.

"I am afraid you are wounded, Tante; I am sorry," she added awkwardly and paused.

Guardian of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls for a number of years, Mrs. Richard Burton, whose professional name was Polly O'Neill Burton, had given up her career on the stage and traveled with the Camp Fire girls in the west. Later when the great war turned the world upside down she had gone with them to Europe accompanied by a wealthy and eccentric spinster, Miss Patricia Lord. After two years in France and a summer in England they had come back to their own country and on account of the Camp Fire guardian's health had spent the preceding winter in the Adirondacks.[*]

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls" Series.

With the close of the winter Mrs. Burton had returned to the stage and the Camp Fire girls to their homes. There had been no meeting between them until to-day.

"Tante" was the title which the greater number of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls used in speaking to their guardian.

"Please don't behave as if you were too wounded to be angry," Sally Ashton remonstrated, moving closer to the older woman and slipping an arm about her. "And please remember that it is a good deal more of a trial for your Camp Fire girls to have been separated from you for all these months than for you to have had a brief rest from their society. Some of us at least realize that you have given too much of yourself to us for the last few years when a so much larger public needed you. I can't tell you how proud I am of your latest success. I have read dozen of notices in the papers and the critics all say that you are more wonderful than ever."

Mrs. Burton smiled.

"You are very complimentary, Sally dear, and of course I am immensely flattered. Nevertheless this does not explain why you girls have never come near me for a month, or taken the trouble to write or telephone. This would not have interfered seriously with the holiday which you seem to feel I have required."

Rising, Alice Ashton came over and stood before her guardian, her expression unusually gentle and affectionate. Ordinarily Alice was not tactful, although sincerity and a fine sense of honor were her ruling characteristics.

"See here, Tante, we are in an uncomfortable position and there is nothing to do save tell you the entire story and let you judge. You will say frankly whether you think we have been right or wrong. I feel sure that Sally and Vera have felt as I do, when I say there has scarcely been a day since our arrival in New York

when we have not thought of you and longed to see you. We have been to your play several times.”

”Why avoid me, dear? What can it be that you find so difficult to say? I prefer to know.”

”Even if the reason will trouble you more than the fact? The truth is that Aunt Patricia would not agree to have us see you.”

”So Aunt Patricia’s influence is stronger than your feeling for me! Perhaps that is as it should be, but I can not altogether recognize what I have done which makes Aunt Patricia not only refuse to have anything to do with me herself, but wish to separate you Camp Fire girls from me as well. I suppose she fears I may affect you with the ingratitude and obstinacy I possess. As long as you were so compliant with Aunt Patricia’s wish, Alice, why did you change? Aunt Patricia has not changed!”

”You are angry and hurt and I don’t know how to go on,” Alice returned, her gray blue eyes darkening, a flush coming into her cheeks.

”Then don’t try, Alice,” Sally interrupted. ”Tante, please be sensible and don’t make a tragedy over a situation that is uncomfortable enough for us all, goodness knows! I have no gift of words but at least I can speak plainly. Alice and Vera both feel under obligation to Aunt Patricia because she is paying their expenses in New York this winter. I have not been here so long as they have, in fact I only arrived a few days ago. Aunt Patricia has rented a lovely little apartment for us and is being generous as only she can be. So when she asked Alice and Vera not to come to see you, they considered that in a way they were obliged to do as she asked; I had no such feeling. Aunt Patricia has been spending a few days with us and this morning at breakfast, I had the matter out with her. I simply told her I was coming to call on you, that she of course must do as she liked, but that I had been caring for you all my life and had no idea of ever doing anything else. If she did not wish me to remain on at the apartment, she could of course send me home.”

”Bravo, Sally!” Bettina Graham said softly under her breath.

”Of course,” Sally added, ”Alice and Vera have a different attitude toward Aunt Patricia. I have never been a favorite with her, as they have, or lived alone with her during their reconstruction work in France. My own opinion is that Aunt Patricia wants to see you so much herself that she is unwilling to have us see you, for fear we shall talk of you afterwards. She made it a stipulation this morning when she agreed we could come to see you that your name was not to be mentioned in her presence. I really am awfully sorry for her. She is very lonely this winter I am afraid, shut up in her big house near Boston. She cares for you more than any one in the world, and only comes to New York occasionally, I really believe to find out how you are, although no one of us has been able to

discover if she has been to see you act.”

During Sally Ashton’s long speech neither her sister, Alice, nor Vera Lagerloff had appeared particularly serene.

Vera Lagerloff was an unusual looking girl; at Sally’s words, her eyes narrowed, her skin paled slightly and her lips parted over her firm, white teeth. In all the years of their Camp Fire life together, no one of her companions had ever seen Vera seriously angry, although she always insisted that notwithstanding her American birth, she shared the Russian peculiarity.

She looked more aggrieved at this moment than was customary.

”Sally is making a good story so far as she is concerned, although not so fortunate a one for us,” she commented. ”Still the worst of it is, Mrs. Burton, that Alice and I cannot altogether deny the truth of what she has told you.” (Vera was always more formal in her manner toward the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian than the other girls, and rarely used the title of ”Tante.”) ”We do feel under obligation to Aunt Patricia; neither Alice nor I could have afforded the winter at Columbia save for her kindness. Yet she did not insist on our not coming to see you, or letting you hear from us. She merely asked it as a favor, and only for a limited length of time. One of the reasons she gave was that you had chosen to separate yourself from us in order to give your time and energy to your stage career and that we should not interfere. Alice and I were merely waiting to decide what was wisest and best.”

”Very well, I understand; please let us not discuss the question any further. Of course, Vera, dear, I know Aunt Patricia also told you I would be an unfortunate influence, but you are perfectly right not to speak of this. Do tell me what you and Alice are studying at Columbia and whether you like New York and, oh, dozens of other things!”

The Camp Fire guardian’s manner was sweet and friendly as her arm encircled Sally and she gave her an affectionate embrace.

Sally dimpled and smiled.

”You are a prophet, Tante. Aunt Patricia suggested only this morning that in order to have your own way, you disregarded every one’s wishes. The implication was that I bore a slight, but unfortunate resemblance to you.”

At this the other girls laughed and the atmosphere cleared.

”Alice is preparing to study medicine and I am taking a course in architecture and another in domestic science. Aunt Patricia talks sometimes of returning to France and spending the rest of her days over there at her home for French war orphans. She says if we wish and our parents agree she may take Alice and me with her.”

Sally Ashton shook her head.

”Don’t worry, Tante, Aunt Patricia will never leave this country without

you.”

Mrs. Burton, who had been glancing into the flames which flickered in a small open fire, now looked up.

”Really, Alice and Vera, I am glad you have done what Aunt Patricia wished, although at first I confess I was hurt and angry. If she needs you, you must fill her life as completely as you can. I don’t agree with Sally, much as I would like to. Aunt Patricia is singularly unforgiving and must have lost all affection for me. You’ll stay to lunch with us. You and Bettina have not had a moment’s conversation and she has a great deal to tell you. I’ll go and see about things.”

After the Camp Fire guardian had disappeared from the room, Bettina Graham slipped into her place beside Sally.

”Do come and sit close to us in a Camp Fire square, if not a Camp Fire circle,” Bettina urged. ”If you girls only knew how glad I am to see you and how your being here in New York makes me more than ever anxious to do what I have been planning! You know how I always have hated the idea of making my *début* in society. Well, as the ordeal has drawn nearer, I have found myself hating the possibility more than ever. This summer while we were at our new home, that we call ’The House by the Blue Lagoon,’ I at last made up my mind what I really wish to do. I want to devote my life to social work and to begin by studying social settlement work in New York this winter.”

Sally Ashton sighed.

”Oh, dear, how did I ever wander into so serious a Camp Fire group? Is there no one of the Sunrise girls who does not wish for a career save me? Of course there are Peggy and Gerry, but they already have chosen matrimony as their careers.”

”Do be quiet, Sally. What a perfectly delightful idea, Bettina dear! Why can’t you spend the winter with us? We have another small bed-room in our apartment and I am sure Aunt Patricia will be delighted to have you with us,” Alice Ashton urged.

Bettina shook her head.

”No such good fortune, Alice! Mother is entirely opposed to my wish and insists upon my following her desire for me. I ran away to New York to try to persuade Tante to use her influence with mother to permit me to do what I like, but I find she takes mother’s point of view altogether. We were discussing the subject when you came in and she had just told me she thought it would be selfish and inconsiderate of me to argue the matter any further. So I suppose I must go back to Washington and be a wallflower all winter.

”I forgot to tell you that Elce, our little Lancashire girl, is here with me. She was ill at school and sent to me, as no one seemed able to find anything the matter, save that she was so homesick and miserable. Now something has to

be done for her and with her and I am so glad to have the opportunity to ask your advice. I am afraid that to send her to another boarding school would be to have the same thing occur, and yet she must have some education. She cares for nothing save her music and the outdoors and was perfectly well and happy when she was with mother and me last summer."

A moment the three girls remained silent, then Sally answered.

"If you and Tante think it wise and Alice and Vera and Aunt Patricia are willing, why not have Elce come and live with us this winter? I know she would rather be with you, Bettina, but if you are to be introduced into society in Washington, you will scarcely be able to give any time to her. Besides, your mother may not wish to have her. Elce can go to school in New York and I'll look after her otherwise. Perhaps this is not the best thing for her, but it is the only solution I can suggest. She won't be so homesick with us as at boarding school and she will have greater freedom, then I shall like to feel that I am doing something useful."

"Good gracious, Sally, isn't making a home for Alice and me being useful?" Vera remonstrated. "I am sorry if I seemed cross a few moments ago; this was largely because you were in the right and Alice and I did not enjoy our position."

Before any one could reply there was a knock at the door and another girl entered.

"Mrs. Burton says that luncheon is ready if you will be kind enough to come in. I am going to ask you not to stay long afterwards; Mrs. Burton would not mention it I am sure, but she is supposed to lie down every afternoon for a short rest."

As the four Camp Fire girls followed Juliet Temple out of the room, Sally managed to whisper to Bettina:

"What is there about Juliet Temple that is so annoying? That little speech she just made is the kind of thing that makes me especially angry, as if she were far more intimate with Tante and more devoted to her welfare than any of her Camp Fire girls? I suppose she is devoted to her and certainly she makes herself useful and yet I never feel sure of her. In my opinion she represents one of the causes of Aunt Patricia's estrangement."

Bettina shook her head.

"I feel a good deal as you do, Sally, although I am not even so confident of the reason. Sometimes I think you are a better judge of character than any of the rest of us, so if you have an opportunity this winter I wish you would study Juliet Temple and find out what you can. Is she really devoted to Tante, or is she only devoted to her for what she thinks she can gain? Come, we must not keep luncheon waiting and I want you to see Elce. Suppose we talk to her of your

proposal.”

CHAPTER IV NATURAL HISTORY

Mrs. Burton's New York apartment was not large.

In her present state of mind Bettina Graham was restless, so, as her mother had consented that she spend the week with her Camp Fire guardian, she devoted many hours each day to being out of doors and to sight seeing.

She was never alone; one of her excuses was that Elce must be amused and not allowed to be troublesome. The little English girl, the daughter of a Lancashire miner, who had been deserted by her father and in a way thrust upon the Camp Fire girls during a brief visit to Ireland, always accompanied her.

Elce was not a trying companion when one wished to pursue one's own train of thought. She talked but little and seemed shy and not particularly clever save for her extraordinary musical gift. Not that she had any gift for the technique of music. One of Bettina's puzzles and disappointments was that so far the younger girl had failed to show any proper interest in the study of music. Her talent seemed spontaneous and natural as a bird's ability to sing and she seemed as little capable of acquiring musical knowledge.

Undoubtedly a problem, Bettina believed that Elce was chiefly her problem. During the summer in "Merrie England," when the little girl had been a maid of all work in their household, she first had become interested in her and in return Elce, whom they then knew by the Lancashire title of "Chitty," had given her a devotion, which she revealed toward no one else. Indeed, the younger girl appeared curiously free from the ordinary affections and to be strangely shy, or self-contained.

It was at Bettina's request that her father had undertaken to pay for the little girl's education. There had been no thought of making her a member of their household, save perhaps during certain holidays.

With Marguerite Arnot the circumstances were different. Marguerite was older and in spite of her difficult background of poverty and hard work[*] was possessed of unusual beauty and charm. Then at once Marguerite had responded to her mother's influence. Indeed, Bettina, although recognizing the unreasonableness of her own attitude, frequently had to stifle pangs of something ap-

proaching jealousy at the sympathetic relation between them.

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls in Glorious France."

Marguerite was no longer shy save in a graceful and attractive fashion. If she played but an inconspicuous part in the social life now surrounding her, she had the French tact and resourcefulness. It seemed to Bettina that, as her own difference of opinion with her mother had grown and developed, Marguerite was beginning to fill her place. In justice she could not criticize Marguerite for circumstances with which she had nothing to do, although not enjoying the idea that her mother was turning to some one else for the sympathy and devotion which should have been her own to give and to receive.

This afternoon, wandering about the Natural History Museum with Elce, Bettina was not particularly intent upon the exhibitions, but instead was planning a letter which she contemplated writing home later in the evening, when Mrs. Burton had gone to the theater and she could be alone.

She meant to surrender her own desire; nothing else appeared possible, but she also wished her family to appreciate that she believed she was being treated unjustly and that she had the right to her own choice of life.

Reaching a secluded corner and discovering an unoccupied bench, Bettina sat down, suggesting that Elce wander about alone and come back for her later. They were on the floor devoted to the reproduction of wild birds in their native haunts. Since the collection was a rarely beautiful one, Bettina believed it would be of so great fascination as to keep the younger girl occupied for some time. Personally she was already fatigued. Moreover, she wished for an opportunity to think without the possibility of being interrupted at any moment.

After her original talk with her Camp Fire guardian she had not referred to the subject of their interview. There was little reason why she should. Definitely she understood that Mrs. Burton's sympathy was with her mother and that she had but scant patience with her rebellion against what might appear to most girls as a singularly fortunate fate.

Bettina was not only disappointed, but puzzled and aggrieved. From any one save her Camp Fire guardian she would have expected such a point of view. She herself was able to accept the fact that it was but natural other people should consider an opportunity to enter Washington society, chaperoned by her mother and with her father's prominent official position, to be the summit of any natural girl's desire. Yet from her Camp Fire guardian Bettina had hoped for another viewpoint. Had she not heard her oftentimes insist that every living human being

must follow his or her own road, and that whether for good or ill she could have followed no career save the one she had chosen.

The difference in their positions Bettina Graham had far too much intelligence not to recognize. She was not choosing the career of an artist and had revealed no exceptional gifts. She merely wanted to give her life in service to persons less fortunate than herself, rather than waste it, as she felt, in a society existence for which she had neither liking nor taste. There was nothing romantic nor inspiring in her desire. Her mother and father were both convinced that such work should be left to older women, or to girls who possessed neither her position nor opportunities.

So since the prop upon which unconsciously she had been leaning, Mrs. Burton's approval and help, had failed her, Bettina decided to make no further protest for the present. Later she must convince her family that her desire was not a whim, a moment's caprice, the influence of a stronger personality, which would vanish when other interests became more absorbing.

Suddenly Bettina got up, realizing that the room in which she was seated was growing surprisingly dark and that a guard was moving about, announcing that the hour for closing had arrived.

Before leaving Bettina had first to find her companion.

At the farther end of the room she observed that a small crowd had formed, who seemed loath to depart.

Drawing near, to her amazement she heard a number of beautiful, birdlike notes with which she was familiar.

Undisturbed by her audience, Elce was standing by a showcase filled with birds from the northern part of England, birds which the little girl had known almost from babyhood, as she had spent the greater part of her time in the woods. To-day amid strange and different surroundings, with apparent unconsciousness, she was repeating such bird notes as she could recall.

The crowd about her was amused and admiring.

Bettina laid her hand on the younger girl's shoulder.

"Elce, we must go at once, it is growing late. And you must remember you are not in the woods, or you will have so large an audience surrounding us some day that we shall not be able to make our escape. You are an odd child! I thought you were exceptionally shy and afraid of people, and now you do a surprising thing like this and appear not in the least abashed."

In farewell Elce was nodding to several persons who had been standing near. She appeared entirely unaware that her behavior had been unusual.

Out in the street Bettina discovered that the darkness had not been due solely to the lateness of the hour, but that a thunderstorm was approaching.

A few moments she stood hesitating. The History Museum was on the west

side of the city and uptown and she wished to reach the east side and down town as promptly as possible. By what method she could most quickly accomplish this result she was not certain. Holding tight to her companion's hand Bettina made a hurried rush toward the Broadway subway.

She had no umbrella and large drops of rain were descending. The darkness was surprising and interesting. Men and women stopped in their onward rush to look upward toward the sky, where the clouds were magnificent.

Then the rain became a downpour. Still Bettina and Elce rushed on, scarcely seeing where they were going.

A moment and Bettina found her horizon limited by an umbrella, which made a circular barrier directly in her path.

"Is it possible that people can meet by accident in New York City in this way? I do not see how you can remember us," she was saying the following moment.

"Our meeting is not so surprising as you think; people who live in New York never see their acquaintances unexpectedly, while strangers always do. I am taking it for granted that you are not a New Yorker. You will have my umbrella, won't you?"

Bettina shook her head.

"No, I cannot do that, but if you will see us to the subway and save Elce from drowning in this rain, I shall be under a second obligation to you. We did find Mrs. Burton the other evening in the fashion you suggested."

Bettina was smiling, amused and entertained by her unexpected encounter. The rain was dripping from her hat, her hair blowing, her cloth skirt whipped about her ankles.

"We are trying to reach Gramercy Square," she added, when they had set out, their companion vainly attempting to hold his umbrella above the two girls.

"Then I suggest you take the bus so as not to have to cross to the shuttle at Times Square at this rush hour. You won't think I intend being impertinent, because already I have discovered two things about you. You are staying with Mrs. Richard Burton and apparently she lives in Gramercy Park. You see, you have an unfair advantage of me in one respect, as you know that my name is Burton and I have no idea of yours."

Making no rejoinder, Bettina's manner became perceptibly colder. She was not an unconventional person and was beginning to fear that she had displayed too great friendliness in permitting herself to recognize an acquaintance whom she had met in so informal a fashion.

Yet until this moment he had seemed unusually courteous.

At her change of manner he turned and began talking to Elce, so that Bettina was able to look at him more attentively.

She had only an indistinct impression of him as he stood in his own doorway several evenings before, giving her the aid of his friendly advice. Curious that she should be appealing to his friendliness so soon again! Now she saw that the young man had brown hair and eyes, was a good deal taller than she, and that he had an expression of delightful gaiety. Unconsciously Bettina felt a slight sensation of envy. She knew the copy of Donatello's faun and there was something in her companion which suggested the famous statue. His brown hair, wet by the rain, curled in heavy clusters, his ears were slightly pointed, his face glowed with health and humor.

"I am sorry if I have offended you," he added. "For my own part, I never have understood why human beings require so much formality in learning to know one another. I confess I have been struggling to discover an acquaintance who knows your Mr. and Mrs. Burton ever since our accidental meeting the other evening. No one seems able to help me. The only human being I know named Burton outside my own family is a Captain Burton I saw in France. He was engaged in Red Cross work over there. But I met him on the street after our return and I remember he told me he was living in Washington."

Bettina bit her lips to hide their smiling, not altogether displeased by this information.

"We have reached Broadway, haven't we? I am so much obliged to you, as here comes our bus. It would be odd, wouldn't it, if by chance we should both know the same Captain Burton. My Mr. Richard Burton was in France in the service of the Red Cross and did live in Washington for a time after his return to this country. He does not use his title at present, since he has given up his Red Cross work, although many persons continue to call him Captain Burton. Of course there may have been any number of Captain Burtons in the army. I have no idea that we can possess any acquaintance in common. Good-by and thank you."

CHAPTER V

RENUNCIATION

At the door of Mrs. Burton's private sitting-room, which was slightly ajar, hearing voices inside, Bettina paused. She had changed her wet outdoor costume for a simple dinner dress, but did not wish to disturb any visitor, knowing that her

Camp Fire guardian saw only intimate friends at this hour and in this room. The room in which Bettina was standing at present was the ordinary reception room.

Mrs. Burton was speaking and an instant later Bettina caught the sound of her own name.

"I did not dream, my dear, that Bettina could be so selfish and unreasonable. I confess I *am* deeply disappointed in her! Save that she told me what she wished with her own lips, I could never have believed she could be so inconsiderate of you."

Then a voice followed which surprised Bettina, although it was the one voice with which she was more familiar than any other.

"But, Polly, perhaps you do not understand Bettina. She never before has seemed either selfish or unreasonable. And if she now appears inconsiderate of me, the fault probably is mine. Bettina should have had a more serious-minded mother, one who would not have asked her to waste her gifts and her beautiful, generous nature in a society existence. I have been talking with Anthony since Bettina came to you. He seems unusually severe and for the first time I can recall is annoyed with his 'Slim Princess,' the title he used to bestow on Bettina. Anthony declares that Bettina should wish to be with me beyond any other possible desire and that she particularly needs my influence. This I am afraid is not true. I have been struggling to make Anthony see, and you must recognize this as an excuse for Bettina, Polly, dear, that her wish at present is merely an inheritance from Anthony. For as long as I can remember Anthony has been working to better conditions for people whom he considers less fortunate than himself. This has kept him many years in political life, when often his own desire has been to retire. Now Bettina simply is longing to express the same ideal in the work that, as a young girl, she feels herself by nature fitted for. I have been standing in her way, I am afraid the selfishness has been mine, although at first I was unable to see the situation in this light. I am so proud of Bettina and so wanted her to be with me in order to introduce her to the brilliant and charming friends Anthony and I have acquired in our years in Washington."

"You are an angel, Betty!" Mrs. Burton responded.

Her companion laughed, for the first time her voice revealing a happier tone.

"Polly, there is only one human being in this world possessed of fewer angelic attributes! That person is your famous self. It is ridiculous and not in the least fair of you to be so critical of Bettina. I presume you have forgotten that when you were a girl you disappeared—was it for over a year?—from all of us who cared for you. At that time you deliberately set out to try your fortune in so reprehensible a career as the stage. Now if Bettina had chosen so undesirable a profession as yours, I might be unhappy. The work she wishes to do is construc-

tive and unselfish. I went to call on Miss Merton, the friend Bettina made last summer who interested her in social settlement work. She has a very different impression of Bettina from the one you seem to have acquired as her Camp Fire guardian. She is a remarkable woman and I never wish to forget what she said to me. She even agreed that Bettina should remain this winter with me and do what I planned for her, yet she believes that Bettina has a wonderful personality and unusual gifts and that one day she will do work that may be of permanent value. Under the circumstances it is I who have failed Bettina. In the future she will remember and find it hard to forgive me."

"Mother!" there was a little rush as Bettina entered the room. An instant after her arms were about her mother and her cheek resting against her beautiful soft hair.

"I have been playing eavesdropper outside the door for the past ten minutes and so heard Tante villify my character and your defence of me. She isn't to be trusted, is she, dearest?"

Bettina glanced toward her Camp Fire guardian. There was a little flash of understanding between them.

Immediately Mrs. Burton rose from her chair.

"I am going into my room to dress for dinner, Betty. I don't know what Bettina's idea of you may be, but I am convinced that you are unreasonable and inconsiderate. I have merely seen your side of this question because of my affection for you. In return you tell me that I have no true appreciation of your daughter and that I have chosen a profession for which you feel not respect while Bettina's choice is altogether admirable."

Mrs. Burton's eyes were lowered and her cheeks flushed as she moved toward her own door.

"Polly dear, I haven't wounded you? Please don't be angry with me, you never have been in all these years."

There was no reply. Bettina whispered, "Don't mind Tante, mother. I think she really intended to force you to defend me. Certainly I am grateful to her. Besides, she needs your criticism this winter, now her play is such a success and she no longer has Aunt Patricia or her Camp Fire girls to keep her in order. As for all those foolish, delightful things you said about me, I shall remember them always, although of course they are not true. When are you going home? I want to go with you, I mean to be the most popular debutante in Washington this winter. The other foolish dream of mine can wait."

Mrs. Graham shook her head.

"No, Bettina, now I understand how you feel, I really don't desire you to do anything except what you wish. Don't leave us, please, Polly, not for a few moments, I want to talk to you. You can't be offended. Miss Merton suggests that

Bettina take some special courses in social work this winter and that she come to her for practical experience in the work two or three times a week.

"I won't be lonely, I'll run over to New York frequently to see you both. And remember, Polly, that you promised me that you would come to me in the spring, no matter if your play is the greatest success in New York. You assured Richard and me that you would not try your strength by a too long engagement. Besides, you have never seen our 'House by the Blue Lagoon'. Bettina and I have given the place this title. It was Anthony's anniversary gift to me. The house is on an island in the sea, but there is an arm of water that has cut its way into the land that is blue as the Bay of Naples. You'll bring as many of your Sunrise Camp Fire girls with you as you can induce to come. This shall be my reward that you and Bettina both care more for what you are pleased to call your careers than for me. I shall try to persuade Aunt Patricia to join us. She must have relented by that time."

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"Never, dear! But of course I am coming to you. I lie awake at night and dream of the happy time we shall have together when the winter's work is past. 'The Blue Lagoon', the very name is magical."

CHAPTER VI

THE BOX PARTY

The group of people entered the box nearest the stage a few moments before the curtain was to ascend.

In the effort to find places there was the usual brief confusion; in the end the youngest of the girls was seated in the chair next the footlights, with two other girls in the adjoining chairs, the chaperon and a fourth girl behind them, while a little in the background were three young men.

"Mother, do take the outside chair; I am afraid you will not be able to see properly, Bettina Graham suggested.

"Besides, Mrs. Graham, we wish the handsomest member of our box party to occupy the most conspicuous place."

Betty Graham arose to change places with her daughter.

"Never mind, David, I am perfectly willing to allow you to talk to Bettina rather than to me, without such arrant flattery which is not apt to make you

popular. Besides, as I have not seen Mrs. Burton's new play and am deeply interested, I do not wish to be interrupted. I am afraid you young persons may wish to talk."

"There will be little danger of conversation once the play is started," a third voice interposed, "I have seen it three times and found it as absorbing the last time as I did the first."

Bettina Graham turned toward the speaker.

"I am glad you were able to come with us to-night, Mr. Burton. Do you remember that you were the first person in New York to mention, 'A Tide in the Affairs' to me? In any event, mother, you need not fear we shall be guilty of such bad manners as to attempt to talk while the performance is going on even if we dared. It is odd that I don't know the story of the play, but then I have done my best not to find out so as not to affect my pleasure."

Dressed in a new evening gown of pale green chiffon, which had been her mother's gift since her arrival in New York, with a silver girdle and a fillet of silver wound about her fair hair, her cheeks flushed with excitement, Bettina Graham had never been more beautiful.

At least this was the impression she made upon two of the three young men who were members of the same party; the third was too absorbed in his own train of thought and in his excitement over seeing Mrs. Burton act for the first time to pay any particular attention to any one of the four girls. Such interest as Allan Drain had expressed had been for Mrs. Graham, who was his especial friend.

As Robert Burton had seen Bettina only four times before this evening, his opinion was hardly of the same critical value as David Hale's, whom Bettina had met and known intimately several years before in France.

Robert Burton, however, had never made any effort to find out why Bettina Graham had attracted him since the first moment of their unconventional meeting. To analyze his own wishes had never been his habit. Accepting her half laughing challenge, he straightway had gone to call upon the Mr. Richard Burton, who was her host, and discovered him to be the Captain Burton he had known in France.

Telling the story of his accidental meeting with Bettina he had asked to be properly introduced and Captain Burton had been glad to agree. He knew something of Lieutenant Robert Burton's war record and also that his father was a prominent New York lawyer; but particularly he liked the young fellow's straightforward fashion of setting out to accomplish his design.

Twice in the past week Robert Burton had called to see Bettina and been introduced to her mother and Mrs. Burton. This evening he had been invited to be a member of their theater party. For the same pleasure David Hale had come from Washington.

"Some night you hope to be sitting in the theater like this, Allan, and have Mrs. Burton produce your first play. I wish you luck. Suppose in the spring you make us a visit at my 'House by the Blue Lagoon'. Mrs. Burton will be with me, resting, and perhaps we may be able to persuade her to read the play you are working on this winter. I shall always feel responsible for the loss of your poems,[*] although Mary Gilchrist was actually the guilty person," Mrs. Graham declared, leaning a little back in her chair and turning her head to speak to the young man behind her. "I still hope some day to make things up to you, or perhaps Mrs. Burton may."

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake."

Allan Drain flushed. He was a tall fellow with strong features and reddish gold hair which he wore fairly long. A student of medicine, he was in reality only interested in writing. He had met the Sunrise Camp Fire girls, their guardian and Mrs. Graham during the past winter which they had spent in the Adirondacks.

"You have fully repaid me for any loss by your friendship," he answered, with a slight huskiness of voice. "To hope that Polly O'Neill Burton will ever be interested in my poor efforts at play writing is too much to expect, yet if it is possible I shall come for the visit with the greatest pleasure. There is nothing I should so enjoy."

A hush at this moment preceded the raising of the curtain. Out of sight of the audience an orchestra began the strains of an Irish melody famous half a century ago.

A suppressed quiver of excitement passed through the small group of Camp Fire girls.

In her seat nearest the stage Sally Ashton bit her lips to hide their trembling, feeling her cheeks suddenly flame. She had been scarcely aware of the conversation going on about her, or that the eyes of a number of persons in the audience had been admiringly turned toward her. She wore a dress of rose-colored net with no trimming save a broad satin girdle of the same shade.

Vera and Alice Ashton were in white, Mrs. Graham in an amber satin with a string of topazes about her throat, her wonderful auburn hair exquisitely arranged, her skin of a beautiful warm clearness, was more lovely than the girl of years before.

Waiting to see the curtain rise she was the Betty Ashton of long ago, who had been one of the first persons to believe in the genius of the girl, Polly O'Neill, always her dearest friend.

"I have not seen Polly act for so long a time, Bettina, I am almost as excited as if this was her *début* night. Yet Polly is sure enough of her laurels these days!" Mrs. Graham whispered.

Then the curtain rose.

The first scene disclosed a small cabin set on a green hillside with a miniature lake in front.

A girl in a green skirt, a white blouse and a green velvet bodice is seen seated on the grass near the water. She is slowly crooning a love song with the words scarcely audible.

Finally becoming impatient, she rises and wanders about, a frown on her face, a pathetic droop to her slim figure.

"Mrs. Burton looks about sixteen, doesn't she? Younger than any one of you!" David Hale murmured.

Bettina paid not the slightest attention to his remark, and scarcely heard it, as at this moment a second figure entered the stage, a boy who is about to set forth on a journey; one recognizes this from his costume before any words are exchanged. He has come to say good-by.

The first act is devoted to their farewell. One learns that the girl is to be left behind with an old aunt who has been her foster mother, while the boy goes to the United States to seek a fortune for them both.

"Mother," Bettina said softly when the curtain had fallen, "don't you think Tante makes the parting between herself and her lover too tragic? It seems to me perfectly natural and there is no special reason for being unhappy, yet just because of her gift for expressing emotion she seems the most pathetic figure in the world as he goes away and leaves her."

Mrs. Graham smiled and shook her head, but made no effort to conceal the tears in her eyes.

"Perhaps you are right, Bettina, I don't know. Polly did not believe you Camp Fire girls would care for her play. It begins in a more sentimental age than the present one. Fifteen years elapse, remember, between the first and the second act. Perhaps the modern girl would not regard the separation from her lover so seriously; she has more interests, more occupations, and sometimes I wonder if love may not mean less to her; I am not sure.

"The girl whom Polly portrays is left utterly alone, save for the old woman, who, we have learned, is harsh and querulous. She has only her dream and her affection."

Talking to Bettina alone, Mrs. Graham discovered that, as the applause died away, the other members of the box party were listening to her little speech.

"I agree with Bettina," Alice Ashton interposed.

"See here, Mrs. Graham, if you believe in sentiment don't look for it among

girls these days," Robert Burton protested. "If you want to know the kind of impression that parting scene of Mrs. Burton's inspires, ask any one of the three fellows in your party to-night. If I cared for a girl and was compelled to leave her for an indefinite length of time, I tell you I should expect her to feel as the heroine does in this play. If she didn't feel that way, I would not believe in her love."

Mrs. Graham arose.

"I'll leave you to argue the point without me. I want to speak to Mrs. Burton for a few moments and she asked that no one else come behind the scenes until the performance is over."

Immediately David Hale slipped into the chair beside Bettina, while Robert Burton moved forward to talk with Sally Ashton who seemed apart from the others. Allan Drain joined Alice and Vera.

"It cannot be possible, Bettina, that you are not returning to Washington to spend the winter," David Hale remarked in a low tone of voice. "Your mother spoke of it to me and then said perhaps you would explain to me yourself."

Bettina flushed, as the subject was not an altogether happy one and she was a little annoyed at its introduction at this instant.

"Why no, I believe not, anyhow not for some time. A group of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls has taken a little apartment together in New York and we are planning to work and study here. We are not to be with our Camp Fire guardian. In fact we are not even to have a chaperon with us permanently. You remember Miss Patricia Lord; one is not apt to forget Miss Patricia. She has a house near Boston and is to appear now and then to see how we are getting on. Alice Ashton and Sally, and Vera Lagerloff made the plan for the winter originally and are allowing my little English Camp Fire girl and me to join them. I am to do some studying, but what I shall like much more, I am to work in one of the settlement houses on the East Side. I shall try to organize new Camp Fire clubs, as I don't believe there are many of them in that neighborhood."

David Hale stared at his companion incredulously.

"You cannot mean you prefer a winter of this kind to making your *début* in Washington, where you would be invited everywhere! I don't suppose it occurs to you, or that it makes any difference, but I am bitterly disappointed?"

"Oh, you will have mother and Marguerite Arnot who will more than compensate for my absence. You know I long have hated the prospect of having to come out in society. I am too serious, I suppose, although I realize this is not an attractive trait of character. But, David Hale, do you recall how much you used to talk to me of your ambitions for the future in the days we knew each other in France? Well, I don't see why I am not allowed an ambition of my own even if I am not gifted. I have always been more interested in the Camp Fire organization

than the other Sunrise Camp Fire girls. Now I see an opportunity to enlarge its influence along with other work I am undertaking. Mother did not approve at first, but she is an angel and has finally agreed. You see she was once upon a time a Camp Fire girl herself."

At Bettina's indifference to his point of view David frowned.

"Well, your mother is right; the new girl is hard to understand, even if one happens to belong to her generation; that is, hard for a fellow like me! I—"

Bettina was not paying a great deal of attention. In the alcove at the front of the box Sally Ashton and Robert Burton were laughing and talking together, Sally wearing her usual demure expression which could change to sudden gaiety. Evidently her companion admired her.

Her mother's return to her place and David Hale's vacating it, distracted Bettina's attention; moreover, the bell was ringing to announce the second act of the drama.

Fifteen years have gone by, but now for the first time the traveler, who had departed as a boy, is returning to the Irish village high up among the lakes and hills.

The report has come back that he has become wealthy and the village is preparing to welcome him. Hovering on the outskirts of the crowd one discovers the girl, no longer young, with whom he had parted many years before. She has not heard from him in a decade. Still she is interested and anxious to know if he will remember her, or if by any chance he may still care a little. She never has forgotten. Some misunderstanding may have divided them, which a few words, a touching of the hands, a meeting of the eyes may explain.

The hero returns. He has forgotten and even fails to recognize the girl who represented his youthful romance, is shocked by the change in her when she recalls herself to his memory.

At the close of the act she goes back to the little cabin and the lake and the green hillside, where she has lived alone these ten years, the old aunt having died.

The pathos of the years of waiting has departed. The meeting in the village has ended an old illusion.

In the third and last act the heroine has established herself in a picturesque little house in the town, where she has gathered about her many friends. She is witty and gay, her clothes are pretty and fashionable. In the lonely years she has read a great deal and has interested herself in politics. The friends and admirers she might have had, save for her faithfulness to a memory, are discovered around her, among them the man, who so easily had forgotten his plighted word. In the end he proposes a second time and is refused.

"Love has no value without faith and I have no faith in you;" with this line

the drama closes.

"The play is delightful and Polly reveals all her gifts of laughter and tears, nevertheless it leaves one dissatisfied," Mrs. Graham insisted, as she allowed Allan Drain to help her with her coat. "Allan, in your new play give us a happier ending."

"My dear mother, what a sentimentalist you are! I could not imagine a more delicious climax. My sex is avenged!" Bettina replied. "Come, let us go back behind the scenes and offer our congratulations!"

CHAPTER VII

THE APARTMENT

The sitting-room was scrupulously clean. The Camp Fire candles, representing work, health and love were on the mantel, but unlighted; a small fire was burning in the grate.

At one side stood a tea table with the arrangements for tea-cups and saucers, the tea kettle and alcohol lamp. At the moment the room was empty.

Then a door swung open and a girl entered wearing a ceremonial Camp Fire costume, her strings of honor beads and insignia of the highest rank, but over her dress a blue apron which came up to her throat and down to her ankles.

Her hair was carefully arranged, parted at one side and drawn smoothly down, yet little tendrils of brown hair had escaped and her face was warmly Hushed.

Seating herself in a low chair she extended her feet toward the small blaze.

"The girls are late this afternoon, just because there was a particular reason why they should be early," she remarked in a maternal tone of voice, a little absurd in view of her appearance.

During the past few months Sally Ashton had been presiding over the small apartment in New York which sheltered a group of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls.

Getting up, she now walked over toward the window. In the distance one could catch a glimpse of the Columbia College buildings and in another direction the dome of the great, unfinished Cathedral. The winter afternoon was clear and cold.

Returning to her former place, after a glance at the clock, Sally drew a letter from the pocket of her blouse and began reading it. This must have been a second



"MY DEAR MOTHER, WHAT A SENTIMENTALIST YOU ARE."

"My Dear Mother, What a Sentimentalist You Are."

or third reading since the envelope had disappeared.

Nevertheless, the letter plainly occasioned her no happiness, for she frowned, bit her lips and looked as if only a severe determination against any display of weakness saved her from tears.

"I have not heard from Dan Webster in a month. Now he has written me exactly one page which says nothing at all except that he is so busy and so tired at the end of each day that any letter he could write would only bore me. He is kind enough to hope we may meet in the spring in the 'House by the Blue Lagoon.' And this when I was foolish enough to think that Dan actually cared for me when we were together last winter!"

"I do wish I were not one of the persons who cares for only a few people! No one understands, or believes this of me, save Tante, and she is too busy this winter to be disturbed by Camp Fire confidences, even though she remains our guardian. I wonder if she will be here this afternoon? As for Dan, I suppose I must stop thinking of him in spite of the fact that we are such old friends."

There was a little sound of a key scraping in a lock. Thrusting her letter inside her pocket, Sally arose hastily.

"Sally, are we first to return home?" Bettina Graham's voice inquired. "I was delayed at the Neighborhood House a quarter of an hour longer than usual. Then I had to make a special effort to persuade the children to allow Elce to come with me. We had been having a lecture on birds and she attempting to reproduce certain of the bird sounds and to teach them to the other children. I wish you had been with us. You have not been lonely?" Bettina observed an unaccustomed expression on the other girl's face.

As if slightly annoyed by the suggestion, Sally shook her head.

"No, certainly not; I am never lonely, I have had everything arranged for our Camp Fire meeting and for tea afterwards for so long that I am tired waiting."

"Very well, Elce and I will change into our Camp Fire costumes and be with you in a few moments. I am surprised Vera and Alice are so late! I hoped Tante and Juliet Temple would have arrived. By the way, Sally, what do you think of admitting Juliet into our Sunrise Camp Fire? We have known her so many months that I am convinced she and Tante must both expect it, although they have not said so definitely. If we have an opportunity before they arrive, suppose we discuss the question."

Bettina Graham's conversation had been continued from inside her own bedroom, with the door opening into the sitting-room which adjoined it. In fact the six-room apartment the Sunrise Camp Fire girls were sharing for the winter, was so built that the three bedrooms and kitchen opened into a single large room. This served as their dining-room, sitting-room and reception room. A small room, apart from the others, Miss Patricia Lord's room, could be used as a

study the greater portion of the time, since Miss Patricia was rarely in New York.

Only twice in the last few months had she appeared unexpectedly. Confessing herself as satisfied with the life the girls were leading and the work they were accomplishing, almost immediately she had returned to her home near Boston, never at any time mentioning Mrs. Burton's name, even to make an inquiry concerning her health.

The little apartment was comfortable. There were no signs of the wealth and luxury with which in the past, during the periods when their guardian was with them, Miss Patricia had surrounded the Sunrise Camp Fire. This, Miss Patricia explained, was due to two reasons. The erection of a home for French war orphans in one of the devastated regions of France was absorbing more of her capital than she had anticipated; moreover, she wished the girls to live simply and to resist the temptation of the worldliness of the city she professed to abhor.

The front door of the little apartment now opened a second time. Carrying several books under her arm and a package in her hand, Vera entered.

"Sorry to have been delayed, Sally, but I had to go several places before I could find the kind of cake you said you wished for tea. I wanted to help you get things ready; you seem to do so much more work these days than the rest of us in spite of our classes and Bettina's social settlement."

"You are not the last, Vera. Where is Alice? I thought you would come home together."

Vera smiled; there was a unique quality in her appearance which made her interesting always, even if she were handsome to only a few persons. In her large eyes with their heavy lashes, her wide mouth and irregular nose there was a charm of character and intelligence more marked than conventional beauty.

"Alice and I said farewell half an hour ago and she was to hurry home. I saw her stop to speak to her cousin, Philip Stead, for a moment and I suppose they have not been able to separate. Dear me, I hoped that Alice and I were to remain eternal friends without masculine interference, but these last few weeks Alice is failing me! She insists that she is only friendly with Philip Stead because he is her cousin and a stranger in New York, and lonely."

"Never mind, Vera, you may have me to take Alice's place. I shall never desert you. I am through with all masculine friendships forever, besides their being through with me!" Sally Ashton returned, thinking of the letter she had just finished re-reading. At the same time she extended her hand for the package.

"Thanks for the cake, but I did find time to make the kind Tante specially likes! However, we will manage to get through with both. You girls are becoming so learned as college students that I try to cling to the few useful feminine arts which represent my only talents."

"And the greatest of us is Sally!" Bettina Graham exclaimed, coming into the

sitting-room, clad in her Camp Fire costume. "There is Alice at the door. Suppose we light our candles and begin our Camp Fire meeting, while she slips into her Camp Fire dress. Tante told us not to await her arrival. She is too uncertain of coming. And besides I hope we may have an opportunity to discuss the addition of Juliet Temple to our Sunrise Camp Fire club. We have had this in mind for some time. Is it our duty to add to our old group now so many of the original group have vanished? Juliet Temple has lived in the same house with us and is at present living with our Camp Fire guardian, so she seems the most natural person to invite."

A few moments later, when the business had been disposed of, Alice Ashton, continuing the subject Bettina had introduced, said slowly, with the seriousness characteristic of her:

"I feel as you girls do about Juliet Temple. I never have really liked her, although it would be difficult to say why. Perhaps it is because she has been so reticent about her past history and revealed so little interest in us. I feel that she does not especially desire to become a member of our Sunrise Camp Fire. She only wishes it because Tante wishes it and is our guardian. Possibly you girls may not agree with me, but now and then I have been afraid that my own distrust is largely jealousy. Juliet seems to have been able to make herself useful to Tante in ways none of us has succeeded in doing. Of late she depends upon her for a great variety of things."

Sally Ashton smiled.

"Good old Alice, of course we realize that we are jealous of Juliet Temple! Are you actually only beginning to be conscious of the fact? Now I for one am in favor of asking her to become one of our Camp Fire girls for certain reasons I do not care to divulge at present. As I am more candid than the rest of you, besides having a less agreeable disposition, I want to say frankly that I shall be glad when for any cause Juliet and Tante separate. Aunt Patricia has always disliked her and believes she has interfered with their devoted relation. I think she remains one of the reasons why Aunt Patricia refuses to be even friendly with Tante, when she is eating her heart out with loneliness and hurt pride. But goodness, there is the door bell and doubtless Juliet is outside! A reflection on our Camp Fire to be caught gossiping! Now if Tante suggests our inviting Juliet Temple to join our Sunrise Camp Fire group, and if Juliet wishes it and can pass the requisite tests, I see no reason we can offer for not including her. For a good many reasons I think it may be wiser to learn to know her better. Please put fresh wood on the fire, I'll open the door."

The following moment the Camp Fire guardian entered the room, followed

by Sally Ashton, Juliet Temple and a third girl.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENIGMA

Half an hour after, seated at the tea table, Sally Ashton was presiding over the serving of tea. She had agreed to relieve the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian of the responsibility in order that she might be able to talk more freely.

A few feet away, surrounded by the other girls, Mrs. Burton was occasionally drinking her tea, but more frequently answering or asking questions. Her custom was to devote one afternoon each week to the ceremonial meeting of the Sunrise Camp Fire. Now and then her visits were interrupted and until to-day she had not been present in several weeks at one of the councils.

Dressed in exquisite taste in olive green, trimmed in an odd, oriental embroidery of green and gold, her dark hair simply dressed, her health entirely restored, the Camp Fire guardian appeared not more than ten years older than the oldest of her group of girls.

"I can't tell you how glad I am that you came directly to us, Gill, without even waiting to telegraph," she was saying at this instant, speaking to the third girl who had entered the little apartment with her only a short time before. She was in deep mourning.

"You will stay on here with us at least until you can make some arrangement you like better," Bettina Graham added, slipping her hand inside her companion's and looking at her with an expression of sympathy and affection.

For the first time in their acquaintance Mary Gilchrist's eyes filled with tears.

"I knew no one else would be so kind, or give me such help, so, as soon after my father's death as I could arrange my affairs I started east. But I did write and gave the letter to one of the men on the place to mail. We are several miles from a post-office and I wanted it to go at once. He must have forgotten, so the letter will probably arrive later.

"I have scarcely any relatives. My father left the farm in Kansas to me. Some day I shall go back and try to become a successful farmer, but when that time arrives I hope to take all the Sunrise Camp Fire home with me. At present I felt that I could not live on in the big empty house alone, so I left one of our

men in charge and came to you. I know I failed to live up to the ideals of our Camp Fire when we were together last winter at Half Moon Lake, yet I believe you realize I shall try not to fail again."

"My dear Gill," Sally announced from her place of honor at the tea table, "you have always taken the attitude that no one of us ever committed a fault in our Camp Fire life together until you failed to confess last winter to Allan Drain that accidentally you had thrown away the manuscripts of his poems. You did confess finally so why not forget the whole occurrence! Certainly you are to live here with us this winter and occupy the room with me; Vera and Alice are together and Bettina and Elce, so I have been alone. Tante is so occupied with her work you will be less lonely with us and Miss Patricia I know will be delighted."

"Nevertheless, Sally, don't you think Gill had best be with me for a few weeks, or a few months, until she has rested?" the Camp Fire guardian protested glancing at the girl in whom the past few months had wrought such changes.

Gill's former air of almost boyish strength and vigor had vanished. Her cheeks were sunken, her eyes had lost their gaiety, even the characteristic light sprinkling of freckles, due to her constant outdoor life, were gone.

Many weeks Mary Gilchrist had nursed her father with a completeness of devotion that had left no opportunity for an hour away from him.

"No, certainly not, Tante; Gill will be a great deal better off here with us. I am sure she would be lonely with you; you are so busy these days and have so many strange people calling on you. There would be no one with whom Gill could talk, or who would look after her as I shall. I believe she needs being taken care of for a time."

Mrs. Burton glanced toward Sally, frowning.

"You forget, Sally, Juliet Temple lives with me, and Gill would not have to be alone when I cannot be with her. Juliet takes wonderfully good care of me and I am sure would enjoy transferring her services to some one who has a better right to them. I am afraid I am growing lazy with Juliet looking after my business affairs, writing my notes and seeing that I am punctual for my engagements. In spite of my being a Camp Fire guardian and struggling to conquer all my faults of character in order to be a proper example to you girls, I am afraid punctuality remains an effort. But Gill of course must do what she likes. I only wish her to realize I want to have her, if she chooses to be with Juliet and me. Juliet is not a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire, but may be some day."

The grating of a key in the front door lock prevented further conversation at the moment.

Sally arose from the tea table.

"I wonder who that can be? No one has a key to our apartment except our own family and no one is away from home!"

The instant later a familiar step was heard in the hall and then a tall, spare figure entered the sitting-room.

"Aunt Patricia Lord, who dreamed you were in New York and how glad we are to see you! Come and sit down and let me give you your tea at once, I know it is tea you always wish after a journey!" Sally exclaimed, putting her arms about the elderly spinster and embracing her.

"Sure and I do, my dear," Miss Patricia agreed, relaxing into a mild Irish brogue, which with her was always a sign of especial satisfaction. "And glad I am to arrive at a Camp Fire meeting. Perhaps it was my duty to have let you know of my coming, but of a sudden I grew so lonely I could not wait to see what mischief you were up to at present. If my little room is occupied I'll go to a hotel to-night and come to see you to-morrow."

Her usual sternness relaxed, Miss Patricia looked from one member of the little group to the other. Suddenly her face stiffened and hardened.

The Camp Fire guardian had risen and was moving toward her with both hands outstretched in a lovely, pleading gesture.

"Dear Aunt Patricia, surely you will speak to me? What have I done to offend you so deeply? Do you realize that you have not replied to one of my letters or allowed me to see you since we parted at Half Moon Lake?"

"I realize it perfectly, Polly, and I refuse to speak to no one. How do you do. You may give my love to your husband. Sally, if it is not too much trouble I prefer to go to my room and have my tea there. Gill, is that you? Come and kiss me, I was sorry to hear of your loss."

Miss Patricia was turning away when the Camp Fire guardian spoke a second time.

"Don't go, Aunt Patricia, on my account. I will leave at once. Our Camp Fire meeting is over and the girls will wish to talk with you. I wonder if you know how it hurts me for you to be unwilling to remain in the same room with me? Once I thought you cared for me—a little."

Without replying the gaunt figure moved away, Sally following her.

Bettina Graham put her arm about the younger woman.

"You are not to go, Tante, we will not allow it. Aunt Patricia is too absurd and unkind! It would be difficult to forgive her, if one did not appreciate that she is suffering more than any one else. Besides, you promised to recite for us before you left."

Mrs. Burton made a swift gesture

"Please release me from my promise, I don't feel that I can just now. Aunt Patricia's attitude toward me makes me more unhappy than any one knows. Juliet, I prefer to go home alone and I wish to walk. Will you stay and talk to the girls about becoming a member of their Sunrise Camp Fire. If they are will-

ing and you will conform to the Camp Fire requirements I should like it very much.”

With Bettina’s assistance putting on her hat and coat, Mrs. Burton lingered a moment longer.

”Will you really be disappointed if I do not recite for you? I don’t wish to be selfish and shall keep Aunt Patricia away from you only a few moments more.

”The other day I came across this poem written by an old friend of mine. I shall only repeat a part of it, I don’t suppose if Aunt Patricia is in her room that I shall annoy her. I’ll speak quietly.”

If Mrs. Burton’s tone was low, her voice held the quality that no one who heard it ever forgot.

The little Camp Fire sitting-room was now in shadow with only the light of the dying fire and the flickering candles.

”Be with us, Beauty, through the toil of life,
 Through youth and through the everlasting years,
 That we may live unwearied by the strife
 Knowing the wisdom of laughter and tears.

”Be with us, Duty, while we seek the goal,
 Honor and fame, courage and high desire,
 Sister of Beauty, as the mortal soul
 Kindles the body with her sacred fire.”

There was a moment of silence as Mrs. Burton ended. Then with a wave of her hand and a few words of farewell, she went quickly away.

Immediately after Sally returned.

”I am sorry not to have been able to say good-by to Tante, but Aunt Patricia kept me standing in the hall while she listened hungrily to her every word. She then shut me out of her room. I never knew any one who was behaving more foolishly, and I should tell her so, if I dared.”

”Juliet Temple, now that we have an opportunity, would you care to discuss becoming a member of our Camp Fire? We have never understood whether you really wished it.”

At Sally’s words the other girls resumed their positions on their ceremonial cushions, which left the one girl an outsider. She remained standing, facing them.

”Won’t you please be seated,” Bettina invited, acting as spokesman for her Camp Fire group which was her usual task.

”You know of course that our guardian desires you to become a member of

our Camp Fire and what her wish and influence mean, but the fact remains that you have never shown any interest in the organization or suggested in any way that you would care to join us. After spending several months with us at Half Moon Lake you know something of our requirements and our ideals. Will you please be perfectly candid?"

At Bettina's request, Juliet Temple had not sat down.

Instead she stood looking down at the six girls as if slightly amused by Bettina's speech.

Never at any time in her memory had she cared for intimate girl friends. Never had she cared less for one than at the present time. Among the girls before her of varying tastes and temperaments not one attracted her.

"You are very kind and I am sure Mrs. Burton intends being equally so and yet I feel it best I should not become a member of your Sunrise Camp Fire. You know nothing of my history, little of my disposition and tastes and I might prove entirely uncongenial to you. I appreciate that you are inviting me, not on my account, but on Mrs. Burton's and yet I am none the less grateful. There are certain obligations in the Camp Fire, certain promises I do not feel willing to make. I am going to ask one favor. Please do not speak of this to Mrs. Burton; allow me to explain my position to her. She may be disappointed and her friendship means a great deal to me, more than any one of you can realize."

"Why can't we realize it? I think I do better than you imagine," Sally Ashton returned, looking closely at the girl who had just finished speaking. "I don't mean to be unkind and naturally we don't wish you to join our Camp Fire circle unless it would give you a great deal of pleasure and be a help to you as well. I do understand, however, that you wish to gain a great deal from your association with our Camp Fire guardian and to separate her from us as much as possible. We are not really so stupid as you consider us. But there, I am extremely sorry to have been rude to you, and Mrs. Burton would be angry," Sally confessed.

Alice Ashton rose and slipped her arm through the other girl's.

It was dark outside and twilight in the little room.

"Will you forgive Sally? No one of us agrees with her and come and see us whenever you have time. Then we shall learn to understand one another better and you may change your mind about our Camp Fire."

"Sally, it was you who suggested that we invite Juliet Temple to join our Camp Fire group. I cannot understand your behavior," Bettina Graham said reproachfully when the unwelcome visitor had disappeared.

Sally looked uncommonly penitent.

"I wanted to ask her simply because I felt sure she would decline. She has some reason for not desiring any of us to know her too intimately. I am sure I regret being rude to her. Unexpectedly I seem to have lost my temper."

"Undoubtedly you did, Sally, and she was our guest," Bettina protested.

She was interrupted by the re-entrance of Miss Patricia into the room. Vera switched on the electric light and Miss Patricia gave a sigh of relief.

"I am glad that girl has gone; I don't trust her for some reason. But there, I suppose I resent Polly's affection and dependence upon her. It is very odd. At first she appeared to have no force of character, but she is cleverer than I gave her credit for; I sometimes fear she is cleverer than any one of us. Without her being aware of it, from the first moment of their acquaintance she has flattered Polly, when I employed too much the other method. Well, I am glad she is apparently so devoted to her interests. Polly no longer has any sense of affection or of duty toward me."

Bettina rose and placed her arm about the older woman, drawing her down into the most comfortable chair.

"Nonsense, Aunt Patricia, nothing separates you from Tante save your own obstinacy and self-will. Forgive me, but I must say it. Juliet Temple is only an excuse. Tante has no special affection for her. Juliet has her own living to make and few friends, and Tante finds her fairly useful and wishes to be kind. But she is devoted to you and your unkindness to her is her one sorrow in her happy and successful winter. Certainly she deserves her success, after so long a sacrifice of her time and talent to us."

"We will not discuss my relation with Polly, Bettina. Girls, change your costumes and let us go out for dinner. It is too late to prepare anything at home."

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE BY THE BLUE LAGOON

"It is enchanting, Betty. How in the world did you and Anthony make the discovery?"

"By accident, dear. We were with some friends on a yacht sailing about in the bay, when afar off I spied this tiny island and asked if we might anchor here for an hour and investigate.

"One could not see the house from the shore, but Anthony and I followed the line of the lagoon until on an autumn afternoon we found it in its deserted splendor. It is a theory of mine, Polly, that each one of us possesses a house of dreams. As soon as my eyes fell upon this, I recognized it as mine. But don't let

me tire you either with my enthusiasm, or by trying to make you see everything at once. Were I wise I should keep a fresh attraction for each day that I might have you with me the longer.”

The two friends were walking about in an open space of lawn before a house built like an English manor house. The house had fallen into partial decay; on this spring day pale green tendrils of ivy climbed the old walls, in the eaves birds were building their nests, here and there bits of the stone were crumbling away.

”We shall never have the money to rebuild the place and have the house appear as it must have a hundred years ago, but I am not altogether sorry. When Anthony found the old place was for sale and the whole of the little island he told me that if we bought it I must never expect this. We only hope to keep it from further destruction.”

”You don’t mean that you actually own the whole of this island, Betty, all these magnificent trees, the blue lagoon, the shore line with its view of the sea? Let us walk down to the lagoon and rest for a few moments. I am more tired than I realized after last night’s journey. As soon as it is warm enough I shall crawl into a small boat and anchor myself in the lagoon for days and nights, when you have grown weary of my society. This might be known as a place of heavenly rest. In sailing across to the island so late yesterday afternoon, I only had a brief glimpse of the lagoon, which cuts into the island from the bay does it not, as if it were an arm reaching into the shore.”

Betty Graham nodded.

”Yes, the island is nearly a complete, circle. One can start from a bank of the lagoon, follow the shore line and return to the opposite bank. Originally the lagoon was to form an anchorage for boats without having to depend on the tides. Once the channel was dug the water has forced its way in until the lagoon has become surprisingly deep. You must promise me to be careful, Polly. I can well imagine your dreaming in your boat and being carried out into the bay and then on toward the sea.”

”Well, dear, would it be a bad way of ending things? Yet I believe I would rather float into your blue lagoon from the sea than away from it. I wonder if the depth of the water makes it appear blue as the waters in the Tropics? Please tell the Camp Fire girls to be careful. What a magical place to bring a lot of people together in! I was sorry not to come to you with the Camp Fire girls, but had to give a half dozen more performances of ‘A Tide in the Affairs’, before my season ended. It was difficult at best, Betty, dear, to close things up while the play was in the height of its popularity. I never could have managed save that you and Richard saw to it that in my original contract I was to be released from playing in the spring. I am supposed to put the same play on next fall, yet I really don’t

wish to. I was never enthusiastic over it.”

”I was not either, Polly, as I told you. Why not play something else? It was never big enough for you!”

”All very well, Betty Graham, but you know nothing of the difficulty of discovering a worth-while play in accord with one’s personality or talents. The good fortune of a real play comes only once or twice in a lifetime.”

Mrs. Graham hesitated.

”Polly, while you are here do me a favor. In a rash moment I told Allan Drain, our young poet-playwright, to bring the manuscript of his latest effort and that if you were in a good humor you might permit him to read it to you. There is no reason to believe his play would be any worse than other plays one has seen. The boy is very ambitious and I think clever and I have invited him for several weeks, so you will have a chance to rest beforehand.”

Mrs. Burton stopped and frowned.

”Betty, dear, please don’t ask this of me. Of course if you make it a favor to you, I have no choice but to agree. But I am so tired and shall never be rested in a few weeks. Of course this is not the real trouble. You don’t know how disagreeable it is to have youthful geniuses read you their efforts and then be obliged to tell them the truth about their work, or at least the truth as one sees it. It hurts them horribly when you cannot admire what they have done and often they never forgive you. Besides, I am a sympathetic person and really hate having to wound them. As for your young playwright, Allan Drain, to whom you have taken an unaccountable fancy, I several times allowed him to read his efforts to me during the winter when we were shut up in the mountains.[*] I was not busy then and more amiable. His work was only fairly good; really he did not reveal exceptional ability. I am cross and tired now and it would only destroy the boy’s pleasure and mine to have to disappoint him. I cannot have him encouraged in the idea that I would ever consider one of his youthful effusions. You are not disappointed, are you?”

[*] See ”Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake.”

”A little, Polly, but the main thing is that you must not be worried, or have anything affect the pleasure of your first visit to me in ’The House by the Blue Lagoon’. I hope you won’t mind the young people.”

Mrs. Burton laughed.

”If you mean my Camp Fire girls, Betty, I regard the speech as too impossible to answer. As for the youths whom you have asked to entertain them, or

be entertained by them, I've an idea that no one of them will have any attention or time to spare for me. Who is here? Not coming down to dinner last evening I am not sure of all the names the girls poured into my ears."

"Oh, only the girls' special friends, Dan Webster, David Hale, Allan Drain of course, Philip Stead, Alice's and Sally's cousin, and Robert Burton. Bettina surprised me by suggesting that I ask the young fellow whom she met by accident in New York when she was searching for you. I wonder if she has seen a great deal of him in the past winter? Has she spoken of him to you? He seems a pleasant chap and admires Sally Ashton. Do you know, Polly, I have half an idea that David Hale is in love with Bettina, and although she is absurdly young, now and then I feel that I would rather she return his affection and lead a woman's natural existence than pursue this idea of social service that the winter's experience, which I hoped in a way might cure her, seems to have deepened. Anthony says David Hale has a brilliant future ahead of him."

The two friends sat down on a low stone bench a few feet from the lagoon. In the April sky small white clouds played at hide and seek upon the field of blue, reflected in the deeper blue of the water.

"And you would like Bettina, Betty dear, to repeat your own life, marry a famous man and be happy ever after? Most parents seem to want their children to repeat their lives, if they have been at all happy and successful. Yet how few of them ever do! Don't set your heart on this idea of Bettina and David. She does not care for him."

"Nonsense, Polly, how do you know! I believe she likes him extremely. She used to write me of him from France."

"Very well, I won't argue the question. There is one person you have left out of your house party, I am afraid purposely, and for my sake I want you to relent. You did not tell me that I might bring Juliet Temple with me, and I need her. Do you dislike her? I never have understood the situation; not one of my Camp Fire girls has ever made a friend of her, Aunt Patricia is violently prejudiced against her, only Richard and I are fond of her. I can scarcely tell you how much she does for us both. She is extremely clever and of late not only has kept house for me, but attends to small business matters that are so annoying. She writes out all the checks for the tradespeople and merely brings them to me to sign, and oh, I scarcely know what she does not attend to! Richard is always congratulating himself at having discovered and brought her to me at Half Moon Lake. The child does not mind doing what a maid would do when I am very tired or very busy, although of course I do not feel I should allow this. I have no right to ask you a favor, have I, Betty, having just refused the one you asked me?"

Betty Graham put her arm about her companion whose frailty always gave her a pang when the met again after any length of parting.

"Oh, have your Juliet Temple if you wish and are so dependent upon her. You know you can do anything you like so far as I am concerned. Yet I think you are making a mistake to trust the girl to such an extent and certainly you should not have her look after your business affairs. She might be careless, and as you are extremely careless yourself, Polly, and Richard not much better, there might be unnecessary temptations. I really believe you both do need Aunt Patricia."

Mrs. Burton shrugged her shoulders.

"You did *not* succeed in inducing Aunt Patricia to make you the visit while I am here, did you? I am sorry, although not surprised. Richard went to see her not long ago and she seemed rather pathetically pleased, made him stay in the house with her and would hardly allow him out of her sight. She refused, however, to forgive me for whatever imaginary wrong I have committed. She says now that she had grown so old and difficult that I returned to the stage largely in order to be rid of her and that she refuses to be any further burden upon me. And this in view of the fact that Aunt Patricia has taken care of me as if I were a child, has lavished her wealth and time and strength upon me and never allowed me to do anything of any kind to repay her. Well, I am through with making repeated efforts to have her forgive me, for what I am not sure. Alice Ashton and Vera Lagerloff seem to have taken my place and I trust she may find them more satisfying than she ever did me. At no time do I remember Aunt Patricia's approving of anything I ever thought or did."

"Don't talk as if you were a spoiled child, Polly; at any moment you need Aunt Patricia she will come to you at once."

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"No, I shall never allow it, or accept any favor from her again. I told Richard this when he returned and said Aunt Patricia still declined to have anything to do with me. I asked him to write this to her, that I should not trouble her at any time in the future. But about Juliet Temple! The child is alone in my New York apartment; Richard is out of town on business for a few days, and I am afraid she is lonely. She has no friends and no relatives except a brother, whom I am afraid, from what she has told me, is not of much account. She seems fond of him, however, and they come from this part of the country I believe; I am not sure just where. As for trusting Juliet to attend to my business affairs, there is an especial reason why I wish her to appreciate that I have entire faith in her. She gave me her confidence upon an occasion when there was no necessity for it and I have always believed in her. As far as money goes, Betty, I am not rich enough to be a temptation to anyone. You know that Richard and I made some unfortunate investments after our return from France and lost the small estate we had saved between us. You did not know that other people were also involved and because Richard was one of the officers of the company, we both feel that we want to pay

back to them at least a portion of what they lost. I made a good deal of money last winter, but have kept only what we need for our personal expenses until fall, when I start to work."

"Oh, Polly, you are so quixotic and so unpractical! Suppose you should fall ill again? But there, forgive me, I should not have spoken of such a possibility. When we are both old and you have grown tired of being famous and admired, will you come here and live with me at my 'House by the Blue Lagoon'?"

Mrs. Burton laughed.

"Yes, Betty dear, I'll hide somewhere in one of your secret passages, while you entertain house parties of distinguished persons from Washington, or elsewhere—Senators, Ambassadors, even Congressmen. With all my love for my work, it is you who are admired and who care for society. Small wonder Bettina was never able to keep up with you! Here comes Bettina with her shadows, Elce and the little girl she brought from the settlement. 'Ardelia in Arcady'! Do you recall the old story of the child who came from the city to the country and was expected to care for it and did not? It was very amusing. Bettina's latest protégé is a pathetic little figure, with her crutch and her city pallor, but she feels dreadfully lost on your desert island amid all this beauty and romance. She is a little daughter of the tenement! I believe I can understand her better than you or Bettina."

"Princess, what are our visitors doing? Polly and I ran away for an hour's quiet talk. She is to learn to love our place nearly as much as I do," Mrs. Graham exclaimed.

Bettina Graham came nearer. She looked grave and sweet, although a little smile showed at the corners of her lips.

"Oh, they are perfectly well entertained without us, dear, and I thought Maida and Elce needed my society for a little while.

"We have small hope of seeing much of you and Tante for a few days until you have grown accustomed to the wholly new experience of being with each other. You are worse than lovers.

"Actually, mother, your house party has accepted your suggestion and has set to work to make you a garden, a new garden where the old one has been this hundred or more years. It is a charming idea! We are to leave such shrubs and roses as will bloom. David Hale and Dan Webster have taken charge and say we are to work two hours every morning, before we are allowed to do anything else—boat, or bathe, or fish, or sail. It is to be a memory or a friendship garden, although we intend to find a prettier and more original title. Anyhow, the garden is to commemorate our first Camp Fire house party by the blue lagoon. Isn't the place exquisite, Tante? Sitting here by the lagoon can one imagine the poverty and sorrow I see every day in my settlement work, or such an experience as

Maida's, whose father is responsible for her lameness? Forgive me, mother, I promised myself not to speak of these things, or even to think of them while I am on your enchanted island."

"This is not my kingdom, Princess, but yours when you will come home to it, yours and Polly's. It is only you people who work for others who deserve enchanted islands. I am delighted to hear about my new garden and my gardeners. We must send for all the flowers we can think of, as April is the perfect month for planting. Do you know I always have wanted a blue garden, I suppose because I have loved blue more than any color all my life and wondered why there were so few blue flowers. Suppose we plant only blue flowers here by the blue lagoon.

"You stay here, dear, I must go and see about luncheon. Bring Polly back with you. I don't want her to go off alone to explore our island and am afraid she has it in mind. One always has the feeling that she will slip away from one somehow."

"No such good fortune, Betty! Bettina, while I think of it, mother has agreed to let me have Juliet Temple here with me, although I am afraid you girls do not want her. I wish you would not be so prejudiced and unfair. She will not be troublesome or intrude on you I am sure, but you will try and see that she has an agreeable time."

"Naturally, Tante, I am not apt to be rude to a guest and will do what I can. Your Camp Fire girls hoped you would be willing to allow us to be with you and do whatever you wished to have done for the little time you are here. If you cannot get on without Juliet Temple, we shall of course be friendly to her. She has been unfriendly, we never have."

"You are cross already, Bettina. Will you speak to Sally? Obviously Sally does not like Juliet, and Sally has a habit of frankness. Tell her I shall be hurt and displeased if she is not especially kind. Now let us talk of something else. Ask Elce and your little lame girl to come and sit by us.

"Elce, if you will sing for me some day all alone here by the blue lagoon, I'll recite a poem to you about these old trees:

"When by the spring's enchanting blue,
You trace your slender leaves and few,
Then do I wish myself re-born
To lands of hope, to lands of morn.

"And when you wear your rich attire,
Your autumn garments touched with fire,
I want again that ardent soul
That dared the race and dreamed the goal.

"But, oh, when leafless dark and high,
You rise against this winter's sky,
I hear God's word: "Stand still and see
How fair is mine austerity.

"Come, let us go back to the house, it must be nearly lunch time."

CHAPTER X

ONE NIGHT

The grounds surrounding the old house were hung with Chinese lanterns.

Walking about in the semi-darkness were groups of figures, ordinarily two in number.

In the big drawing-room the music had just ceased, while the musicians were having their supper and a brief rest. Senator and Mrs. Graham were giving an informal dance for their daughter and house party.

Other guests had crossed over from the mainland, which was not an hour's journey in a motor boat or one of the small steamboats that carried mail and provisions, but was apt to be a long crossing in the uncertainty of a sail, and almost impossible in a rowboat, unless one were a singularly strong oarsman.

There were half a dozen young officers from the fort and as many girls from a fashionable hotel on the Virginia coast.

"Sally, it has been utterly impossible to have a word with you, to say nothing of a dance! A fellow likes a girl to be a good dancer, but not so good that he never has a chance with her. I must say that you and Robert Burton look pretty well together, he dances almost as well as you do and makes me feel awkward and clumsy. Somehow I am surprised that you are such a fine dancer, Sally, when you don't like other kinds of exercise," Dan Webster concluded.

"If you are going to start our walk, Dan, enumerating my faults, I do not intend to go one step with you, although it is one of your favorite amusements. All very well we have known each other a long time, but I do not think that a sufficient excuse."

Arm in arm Sally Ashton and Dan Webster were sauntering away from the veranda toward a more deserted portion of the lawn.

Sally spoke in the demure tone and manner, which oftentimes disturbed her companion, since he was not able to guess whether she were in earnest or amusing herself at his expense.

"Nonsense, Sally, I could not enumerate your faults for any length of time! I only think you possess two or three faults, and sometimes, not often, I have been known to speak of them.

"At present I cannot imagine what I have said or done to annoy you, unless following you around all evening and trying to induce you to pay some slight attention to me has troubled you. In that case of course in future I shall leave you alone.

"I joined the house party when it was extremely difficult for me to be spared from the farm, chiefly in order to see you. I have seen less of you than any one else and at times this has not looked like an accident. If this is true will you be kind enough to be frank."

Sally gave her companion's arm a slight squeeze.

"Don't be such a bear, Dan. You always were a surly small boy when you were annoyed in the days we used to play together.

"There is a hammock under the linden trees; let us sit down if you do not mind, I am a little tired after dancing so long. You know perfectly well how much engaged we all have been since our arrival at the island. You reproach me for not deliberately separating myself from the others, when I have not said a single word to you for failing to write me a half dozen letters all during the past winter. I suppose you were writing to so many other persons!"

"No such thing, Sally. As you well know, I simply can't write letters that are worth a row of pins; they never seem to express what I think or feel, and I am afraid of boring you. If I speak of something now, you won't consider that I intend criticizing you; I suppose I do keep more of a watch on you than on other girls, because I am more interested. Twice lately you have deserted every one in the house party and gone off somewhere to some mysterious part of the island alone. Please don't repeat this. You see it does not look well and worries me. The island is fairly deserted, but there are spots where fishing boats might land, or people out for a holiday. If you feel you want to be alone, I can follow you and promise not to interfere in any way."

In a hammock swung by chains in a small grove of linden trees, Dan and Sally sat down.

The April night was surprisingly warm with a breath of summer that comes now and then in the southern spring. The tiny blooms of the trees made a shower of fragrant gold about them. From beyond blew the salt breath of the sea.

Sally remained quiet a moment before replying.

"You are very kind, Dan, I am sorry you have noticed that I have gone

away once or twice alone. I have not been in the slightest danger and had a definite reason for going. I can't tell you what this is, probably it is not of any consequence, yet I must ask you under no circumstances to follow me."

"And I decline to make you such a promise, Sally, in fact I forbid your wandering about the island alone. If there is any mystery connected with your behavior, I thought you hated mysteries; in fact you assured me that after your experience in caring for Lieutenant Fleury[*] in France, you were through with all secrecy forever!"

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls in Glorious France."

"There is no especial mystery in what I am interested in at present, Dan, at least nothing of importance. Indeed, I am indulging in a whim, and as I am doing no one any harm I think I have the right. Perhaps I shall not keep up my quest very long, only a few days until I make a discovery," she added, feeling a stiffening of the figure beside her and appreciating, without having to behold the firm line of the lips. She and Dan Webster had known each other so many years that there were traits of his character she thoroughly understood.

"Besides," she protested, as an afterthought, "you have not the faintest right to forbid my doing anything I wish."

"No, I suppose not," Dan returned, not looking toward Sally, but at the old house a short distance away, shadowy and stately under the stars. "I presume I never shall have that right, even if you come to care for me some day as I hope you may care. Indeed, I almost believed you would when we parted last, but now I see what an ass I was. I told you then I would not speak of this until you were older and I had made something of myself. I never will amount to much, Sally, I see that pretty plainly here in comparison with only a small group of other fellows. David Hale is the real thing, brilliant and ambitious and knows what an educated man should know. Allan Drain is the artist with his writing of poetry and plays. He talks in a way that makes you sit up now and then, even when you do not agree with him or get all he means. Philip Stead is a student and will end by being a professor. Robert Burton I don't understand so well, although he has something none of the rest of us have, not just good looks and good manners, while I—well, Sally, I only want to make things grow, to watch the wheat ripen and turn gold, the cows on the old New Hampshire hillsides feeding beside their calves. The farm is double the size it was once and I intend it shall be four times larger. I mean to gather men about me interested in making agriculture what it should be and farmers' lives the most independent and worth while. When I am rich, rich as ever I am apt to be, I plan to found an agricultural school and to give the land and the benefit of the experience I have had and my father and grandfather before me. Don't think I fail to realize how dull this sounds; when I speak of it most people yawn or struggle to appear polite and change the subject.

I don't care, it is only how you feel, Sally, that matters. You have had so much experience and this past winter in New York has changed you more even than the years abroad. Once upon a time you would have granted the small favor I just asked you, now you won't even do this for me."

"Dan, you *are* stupid; I wonder sometimes if I shall ever make you understand how dull you are on *one* particular subject. At present I'd rather you would not know. As for doing the favor you asked, I won't because I have a reason which I believe justifies my refusing. You know how obstinate I am, everybody who knows me is of the same opinion on the subject. Why not try to trust me? As to the effect the past winter has had, I do feel older and more self-reliant. Mary Gilchrist was ill almost the entire winter and I had the care of her, then I was the housekeeper for the Camp Fire girls. Never apologize to me for *your* stupidity, Dan, dear, which I don't think is apparent to any one save you. Among the Sunrise Camp Fire, no one even thinks of disputing the recognized fact that I am the least clever of all the girls. I do not even mind especially. I find life interesting and after all one cannot make oneself over altogether!"

For the first time in the interview Dan laughed, a good natured, boyish laugh, full of strength and sweetness.

"If you are stupid, Sally, then I am proud to be in the same company with you. I should like to know what Tante thinks of you! You may be less interested in books and more in human beings."

In the half darkness Sally smiled.

A lantern in one of the trees overhead swung and tilted so that the light shone down on her face.

Sally wore her rose-colored net and had a scarf of the same rose color about her shoulders. Tucked under her brown coil of hair in the fashion of the women who had danced in this old southern house and paraded its lawns a century ago, was a pink rose, a little crumpled now and faded.

Dan put up his hand and touched the rose gently, one could scarcely have thought there could be such gentleness in the strong fingers.

"Give me your rose, please, Sally; I don't know just why I want it, but I do. I never could see much sense in fellows wanting to hold on to things like this before."

Sally jumped up suddenly and the little rose fell to the ground.

"Please be careful, Dan, here comes Tante and she may see you. I don't know what she would think."

The girl's movement arrested Mrs. Burton's attention.

She was walking about in the silver night with Senator Graham, whom she had known many years before as a poor boy, with little education, with nearly every handicap, lack of family, of influence and position. He was now one of the



"I Wonder if I Shall Ever Make You Understand How Dull You Are on One Particular Subject."

distinguished men of the country.

"Is that you, Sally and Dan? May I speak to you? Anthony, go back to Betty and see that she rests for a few moments, she is the most tireless hostess in the world! Sally and Dan will escort me to the house if I am not able to walk the few yards alone. And will you tell Betty that if I disappear I have gone up to my own room. I shall listen to the music until the dancing ends and then go to bed. The boat goes back at midnight, so I suppose the dancing can't last much longer."

Mrs. Burton sat down in the hammock between Sally and Dan, slipping a hand into each of theirs.

Dan Webster was her nephew, the son of her twin sister and of the man who had been under the impression that he cared for her before his discovery that they were entirely unsuited, and that the sister, who was her opposite in everything save her personal appearance, was the real love of his life.[*]

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls Amid the Snows."

Sally Ashton was the daughter of two friends of her girlhood.

With no children of her own, Mrs. Burton cherished a deep affection for Sally and for Dan, but for different reasons. One reason was the same—she had a feeling of dependence upon them both. Dan was nearly like her son. Sally Ashton, well, most people who knew Sally intimately did depend upon her, without being able to explain why.

"Children, do a favor for me. You'll hate it, but Sally has promised. Come with me and find Juliet Temple and see if she is having a good time. If she is not you'll dance with her, Dan, and make yourself agreeable? Juliet has not been here so long as the rest of you and I am afraid feels lonely. She seems to spend most of her time alone. You like her well enough, don't you, Dan?"

"Of course, Tante, she seems all right, strikes me as clever. She isn't about much; when she is, it never occurred to me that she would be interested in me. If you are fond of her I'll do my best."

Dan put his arm about Mrs. Burton's waist.

"You are coming to the farm to be with us for a time when you finish your visit to the 'House by the Blue Lagoon'? Mother will never forgive you and will perish of jealousy if you do not. She does not enjoy the idea that you are fonder of Aunt Betty than of your own twin sister. We both wish you would give up that plagued stage and you and Uncle Richard live with us until you are a little less like a wraith. But see here, Tante, I'll strike a bargain with you. Sally will have nothing to do with me at present. If you will promise to bring her with you

to the farm for a visit this summer I shall devote myself while I am here to your Juliet Temple, that is, if she will allow it."

Mrs. Burton smiled.

"Dan, I suppose you know you are like your father, only nicer. I don't want you to be so attentive as to deceive Juliet, only to see that she has a good time. I have been looking for her for the past hour and she does not seem to have danced with any one."

"Juliet may have gone for a walk, Tante, I think I saw her a short time ago. I have not forgotten that you said you wished me to have her in mind," Sally remarked. In her speech, or in her manner there was nothing that was unusual, nevertheless both Dan and the Camp Fire guardian were aware of bewilderment.

"Do you mind walking about with me for a few moments and trying to find her? Of course I know *you do* mind, but will you in any case?" Mrs. Burton pleaded.

"I am a tiresome woman, Dan, to have interrupted your talk with Sally, but I will make it up to you some day. Sally is difficult, but worth the effort. You must promise me that you will say nothing to her and even feel nothing for the next few years, then I will be your warmest ally," Mrs. Burton whispered, walking close beside the tall fellow who towered nearly a foot above her, while Sally moved along the path in front of them, a figure of rose and silver.

Half an hour later the Camp Fire guardian was sitting in her room half reading, half listening to the music and voices in the house and garden beneath her open windows.

She was in her dressing gown and her hair was unbound. The big room was in shadow, save where the light fell about her reading-lamp. One could see the tall ceilings, the high windows, the few pieces of old English furniture, brought to America by the early Virginia settlers.

There was a faint noise of a door being softly pushed open in the adjoining room.

"Juliet, is that you?" Mrs. Burton inquired. "Are you tired of the dance and on your way to bed as I am? I looked for you before I came up and could not find you, I suppose you were somewhere in the grounds."

"Yes, I was. Is there anything I can do for you? Is your bed turned down?" the girl answered.

Mrs. Burton nodded.

"I believe so, but you must be more tired than I am, so please don't trouble about me to-night. You are too considerate of me altogether. There is some business in the morning I should like to have you help me with for an hour or more. My accounts seemed to have become tangled in the most absurd fashion and I should like to have them straightened out before Captain Burton joins us.

You are a good mathematician, Juliet, and neither of us are. Now go to bed."

The girl lingered.

"I want to say something first, perhaps this is not the proper occasion, but it does not make much difference. Since I came to live with you, Mrs. Burton, I have tried to make myself useful, but I don't think I have ever spoken of the fact that I have grown to be very fond of you. Oh, I realize this is not an unusual experience so far as you are concerned, most of your friends and family seem to adore you, but it is unusual with me. I never have cared for any one, except my brother. I told you that he and I were orphans and that he was younger. Until he joined the army he gave me a good deal of trouble, but has been better since. I persuaded him to continue as an enlisted man and to try to pass the examinations for an appointment as an officer later."

"A wise idea, Juliet. Is there anything I can do to help you? I am not a very influential person, but would do anything possible."

"No, no, there is nothing," the girl returned hastily; "I am going to bed in a moment."

The older woman continued her reading, a little disturbed by the fact that her companion would not retire and leave her alone. She liked Juliet Temple and was grateful and appreciative, but never had felt for her the spontaneous affection she had for her group of Sunrise Camp Fire girls. This fact did not trouble her, she never had cared equally for all the girls associated with her in the most intimate fashion during the past few years. Human nature makes its inevitable selections. At the moment not wishing to be unsympathetic she was hoping that her companion would make no special demand upon her at this hour of the night when they were both weary. Sentimentality in their relations the Sunrise Camp Fire girls never had indulged in and she never had encouraged.

"Mrs. Burton, I hate to speak of this, but I must. Do you think you can give me a larger salary for the work I am doing for you. I need it a great deal."

A short silence, then Mrs. Burton laid down her book and flushed.

"Juliet, is this what you have been trying to say? I am glad you have been frank, even though I must refuse your request, Please don't think I am not sorry, but you understand Captain Burton's and my circumstances at present almost as well as we do. You know we are trying to pay a debt that we believe we owe. We enjoy having you live with us, you have been the greatest aid and pleasure, but the fact is that you really have been spoiling me, as it is not actually essential that I should have you. I could manage to keep house with dear old Elspeth, who came to New York to be with me from Half Moon Lake, and who could probably look after things as well as you or I. I can even attend to my tiresome letters and business if I must. I have told you several times, dear, that I thought you were being wasted upon me. When I go back to town I can find you a much better

position with a good deal larger salary. I can do this at once if you like.”

The girl shook her head.

”No, I told you I did not wish this, perhaps it does not matter, I may not need the money after all.”

”Don’t decide at once, Juliet. Good night. Are you having a happy time here? I wish you liked the Camp Fire girls better. You would be happier with more friends.”

”Oh, the girls are agreeable enough, the fault is mine. Mrs. Burton, do you think it possible to be truly fond of any one and yet to do that person an unkindness, a serious unkindness, not a trivial one?”

Mrs. Burton closed her book.

”My dear Juliet, what are you talking about? Of course it is possible, almost anything is possible with human beings, yet it is scarcely the kind of affection one would care to receive. But now really I want to go to sleep, the music has ceased downstairs and I hear voices in farewell. The dance must be over.”

CHAPTER XI

THE SAME EVENING

Reluctantly Mary Gilchrist had joined the house party at the ”House by the Blue Lagoon”.

After her arrival in New York for the first time in her life she had been ill, nothing serious at first, merely a languor and depression which she could not shake off, and then a fever which persisted for some time in spite of every care and devotion.

Never a day passed that she did not say either aloud or to herself that she would have felt scant interest in her own recovery had she not been living with the Camp Fire girls.

After her father’s death she was almost entirely alone, with no relatives save distant cousins and separated from the friends of her youth by the years in France. Always she and her father had led a fairly isolated existence on their big thousand-acre wheat farm. Her own love of the outdoors, of boyish amusements and of the work of the estate, together with her father’s companionship, had been sufficient.

Shut up in the small New York apartment, ill and grieving, notwithstanding,

the affection and attention lavished upon her, for several months Gill had found life difficult.

With the arrival of the cold New York spring she approached a better frame of mind, but still was without desire to join in any gaiety.

Her one expressed wish was to be allowed to remain alone in the apartment while the other girls went for the visit to the "House by the Blue Lagoon".

This they positively refused to consider.

As she had been Sally's especial charge, Sally announced that she did not believe Gill sufficiently strong to make the journey or to be in the society of so many persons, so she had concluded to stay on in New York with her. Sally was not easily dissuaded from a decision, so partly to avoid this sacrifice, partly because she did not wish to be separated from her friends and was interested in Bettina Graham's home, Gill finally agreed to accompany them.

The stipulation was that she was to be allowed to be alone as much as she liked and to take no part in any of the entertainments, unless she felt the inclination. No one would try to persuade her to do anything against her wish.

On this evening of the dance, Gill had been undecided whether or not to leave her own room. At length the desire to see the beautiful old house lighted and filled with spring flowers and the girls in their party dresses brought her down to the drawing room. Here she was introduced to a number of the guests and enjoyed talking to them, but positively refused to dance. And no one insisted beyond the ordinary demands of courtesy, as her black dress offered a sufficient explanation.

Gill was not in deep mourning; her dress was of sheer black muslin, cut low in the neck, with a narrow edging of black net.

She no longer wore her hair bobbed in the old, half boyish fashion, but dressed as simply as possible in a knot at the back of her head.

The small claim she possessed to good looks, Gill believed had vanished altogether and for all times. Her color was gone and her animation and she had depended upon both.

Yet to Allan Drain, who found himself glancing toward her with interest several times during the evening, she possessed an attraction he had not been aware of in their acquaintance at Half Moon Lake. There was a softer and gentler atmosphere about her. Her pallor, in contrast with the red-brown hair and eyes, had its own beauty.

Toward the latter part of the evening, observing that Gill was so white that she appeared ill, Allan crossed the room to the chair where she was sitting alone at the moment.

"Won't you come out of doors with me for a little while, Miss Gilchrist. I believe you will like it better than indoors and I know I shall."

Then, as Gill hesitated.

"Please come, I have not had an opportunity to talk to you alone since our arrival. I want to tell you that I think I was a good deal of a boor in refusing to say I forgave you last winter when you confessed that by accident you had burned up the manuscripts of my poems. After I returned home I discovered copies of a number of them stored away in odd places. I am obliged to confess they seemed so utterly no account that you did me a favor by destroying them before they could be read by any one."

Gill shook her head.

"You are kind, but I don't in the least believe you. I told you then and I still feel that I would rather you would not forgive me. I have no idea of forgiving myself."

"Is it too far, shall we walk down to the lagoon? I have not seen it at night."

Allan picked up a white shawl which some one had left on the veranda.

"No, it is not far, but it is probably cold down there, so put this around you. Isn't this place a marvel? Any one who could not write poetry here, or at least dream it, could nowhere on earth. Do you know the story of the house and the island and the blue lagoon? I have made myself a nuisance trying to find out."

"No, not as much as I should like to hear," Gill answered, placing the shawl about her shoulders in an obedient fashion.

"Originally the island was given by a special grant from the British king to an Irishman named Bryan O'Bannon, who had fought gallantly in his service during one of the innumerable wars. He appears to have been unlike most Irishmen and a man of wealth, or else he married wealth, because his wife was one of the sisters of the great Lord Fairfax of Virginia.

"They built this place and lived here like royalty, with hundreds of colored servants I suppose. There is no special story of a tragedy until the civil war. Then one day a boatload of northern soldiers landed on the island and took possession. None of the men of the family were at home. It chanced, however, that a young Confederate officer was on leave of absence visiting the girl to whom he was engaged. When the northerners surrounded the house, she hid him in one of the secret passages. The story goes that she was insulted by one of the enemy and drowned herself in the blue lagoon. The young officer, waiting her return and not knowing how to escape, starved to death."

Gill shivered.

"Good gracious, what a tale on a night like this! No matter how beautiful a place is, nor how shut off from the world, it seems never able to escape sorrow."

Allan Drain looked more closely at his companion, whose expression was scarcely discernible in the flickering lights made by the Chinese lanterns, swinging like censers between the trees that led to the blue lagoon. The winter before

she would not have been capable of a speech like this!

"I am sorry, perhaps I should not have told you so unhappy a story. I should have remembered that you have been ill and in trouble. I have not had an opportunity before to express my sympathy. I have been through such a lot of bad health myself, at least I appreciate what *it* means."

"You are all right now, or a great deal stronger? Certainly you look so. You are kind to be so good to me. I was so stupid and disagreeable when you were ill and lonely during the winter in the Adirondacks. I seem to be one of the persons who has to learn through experience. Until recently I have always been so well and I am afraid spoiled. I hope I shall never be so impossible again. Tell me do you feel more interested in your medical studies, or is writing still your one ambition?"

"I am ashamed to say that it is, ashamed because I seem to have so little talent to justify all the time and thought I give to it, when I should be hard at work trying to learn my profession. I often fear I am one of the people who shall fall between the two, a failure in both. I did not intend to be so dismal, but I have had a pretty severe disappointment of late."

"I am sorry, would you rather tell me of it, or not?"

By this time they had reached the edge of the lagoon and stood looking down at the water, so deep a blue it was nearly black under the night sky with the stars reflected in its surface.

There were few waves and only a light breeze; a small row-boat tied to a stake lapped gently to and fro.

"Would you like to go for a row? I am not a skillful oarsman, but I can manage. We need not be out long."

Gill hesitated.

"I would like it very much, but we must be sure to return before the dance is over. I won't be able to help with the rowing, I have never attempted it in my life. You know I am an inland person and never have spent any time near the sea until now. I never saw the ocean until we crossed to France."

With the boat untied, Allan helped his companion in and Gill sat down facing him.

Neither of them spoke until they were a few yards from the shore and moving toward the opening into the bay.

"Yes, I would like to tell you of my disappointment. I have not wished to speak of it to any one else, why you will understand when I explain the circumstances.

"Last winter in New York Mrs. Graham suggested that, when I came to make her a visit in the spring at the 'House by the Blue Lagoon', I might bring with me the manuscript of the play, which I have been at work upon for a year

and that she would persuade Mrs. Burton to allow me to read it to her. Of course with this possibility I have worked doubly hard until there have been moments, not many I confess, when my play has not seemed altogether bad. I have had Mrs. Burton in mind as I wrote; I could not help this, she is the only great actress I have ever known personally and in some ways the greatest I have ever seen act. I don't believe I have been mad enough to dream that she would like my play well enough to appear in it, but I hoped that she might say a few words of encouragement, perhaps give me a letter of introduction to a manager who would read my play if she made the request."

"Well, what has happened?" Gill demanded, leaning forward with her lips slightly parted, her eyes large and interested fixed upon her companion's face.

"Only that Mrs. Burton declines to be annoyed. Mrs. Graham did not offer exactly this explanation, but what she said amounted to the same thing. Please don't think I am blaming Mrs. Burton, I understand her position. She sent word to me that she was very tired after a winter of hard work and that for the present wished to forget the stage altogether. She begged me to appreciate that she was not a producer of plays and that her opinion of what I have written would be of small value. In case she did not like my work she might disappoint me, when a manager might be delighted with what I have accomplished."

"Yes, that is true," Gill returned, "so why feel especially disappointed? I am sure Mrs. Burton will give you a letter to a manager, even if she prefers not to read your play."

With the peculiar despondency which is an attribute of the artistic temperament, Allan Drain shook his head.

"No, if Mrs. Burton is not interested, I do not care to interest any one else. With every line I have written I have thought and dreamed of her as my heroine. I don't want any one else to play it, at least this is the way I feel at present."

In several moments Gill did not speak, while Allan Drain pulled hard at his oars, wishing to conquer his discouragement through strenuous physical exercise.

He was surprised when his boat so soon shot out of the lagoon into the broader waters of the bay. The waves were not high and he rowed quietly and steadfastly, keeping close, as he believed to the shores of the small island.

Still Gill dreamed on, feeling wonderfully peaceful and happier than in many months. She never had forgiven herself for her carelessness in throwing the manuscript of Allan Drain's verses into the fire in their winter cabin at Half Moon Lake. Now it was a consolation to discover that Allan Drain really had forgiven her; there was no pretence in his words and friendliness to-night. If only she had possessed sufficient influence with their Camp Fire guardian to persuade her to do what he so greatly wished! After all it was not so tremendous a favor,

in Gill's estimation. However, if Mrs. Burton had refused the request made by her hostess and most dearly loved friend, no one else would avail.

"I am so sorry, I do wish I could be of service," Gill murmured, speaking as much to herself as to her companion. "Don't you think perhaps we had better start home? I don't wish to, I did not realize that I was so tired watching the dancing and being in the midst of so many people until you brought me out into this beauty and quiet."

"Yes, well I'll go on only a few moments longer and then turn around. Once we are inside the lagoon we can reach our landing in a quarter of an hour."

When he spoke Allan was not aware that the wind was growing stronger and that the tide was turning and running out toward the sea. Neither did he realize the length of time he and Gill had been on the water, nor the distance they had gone, so swiftly and smoothly his oars worked, as the boat moved in unison with the tide.

Ten minutes after their brief conversation, in attempting to swing around, Allan discovered that he had a task ahead of him. To his surprise and consternation he also found that already he was fatigued. He had been out on the water only once since his arrival at the island and then in company with David Hale who was an excellent oarsman. It had not occurred to him that as he had rowed only two or three times in several years he was not in training.

Fortunately his companion was not aware of his difficulty and was remaining blessedly silent, so that he could give his entire attention to his rowing.

Allan strained and pulled, realizing that the wind was blowing him out of his course.

A half hour he kept on without faltering, always with the intention of reaching the shores of the island and skirting it until he could discover the lagoon. And always his companion continued silent.

When he had time to think, Allan concluded that she had fallen asleep and was grateful.

If he could not get in to shore he was managing not to be driven far out of the course.

At midnight the small steamboat would call at the island to take the guests back to the mainland, who were not to spend the night, and with luck he might be able to signal them.

"Don't you think you had better rest for a few moments, Mr. Drain?" A quiet voice suggested. "Please don't be worried, I am not uneasy. At the worst, if we cannot reach the lagoon and no boat comes to our rescue, we shall only drift about until the tide turns. When daylight arrives we shall have no difficulty. I hate your wearing yourself out and wish I could help."

Gill laughed, a more courageous, gayer laugh than he had heard from her

since their earlier acquaintance.

"Why, you did not think I was asleep? I am not so stupid as all that! I did not wish to trouble you by talking."

Compelled to follow Gill's advice, resting his oars, Allan allowed their boat to move with the tide. Another half hour went by; at length both of them appreciated that it must be well past midnight and there was little chance of rescue by their friends. The small steamboat crossed directly from the island to the mainland and made no circuit of the bay.

Without comment Allan picked up his oars again.

"I think I can manage to reach the island, even if we do not discover the lagoon before dawn. I have walked around the island several times and there are a number of places where one can land. We will be more comfortable than in this cramped little boat and warmer. Besides we are in some danger with the waves growing higher and stronger and the night darker. I am not going to attempt to disguise the fact from you, you are as courageous as I am, in truth you are more courageous as I remember you. If you wish to have the score settled with me in regard to the accidental burning of my manuscript, I have accomplished it with a vengeance to-night by bringing you out on the water and getting you into this difficulty. I only hope you may not be ill again as a result of my stupidity. But I must not talk, I have no breath to spare. Once we are safe and ashore I'll offer my apology."

"Don't worry about me. If it were not that the others may be troubled, and I trust Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Burton went to their rooms before anyone missed us, and if you were not wearing yourself out, do you know I could enjoy this experience. I am not in the slightest degree frightened, I suppose I am a kind of an adventurer."

A quarter of an hour after, Allan and Gill beheld a darker line of land and rowing closer their boat grounded in the sand amid shallow water.

"I'll carry you ashore, it will be simpler than trying to get in by any other method. Then I'll wade out and drag the boat after us."

"I can wade, please don't, I am far too heavy," Gill protested, remembering the character of illness from which Allan Drain had suffered at the time of their first meeting.

As he lifted her from her place and her arms closed about his throat, there was no sign of weakness in her companion.

Five minutes later she was seated on the dry sand, able to see the tall figure struggling in the darkness and drawing the heavy boat ashore.

"You should have allowed me to help, it was not fair," Gill argued almost angrily, as, panting for breath, he dropped down at her side with the boat only a

few feet away.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAMP FIRE

"No, I don't need your coat. With the heat from the fire the white scarf is sufficiently warm. I am grateful to you for making me bring it along. I don't think we had best sit still at present. You are so overheated, it will be wiser to cool off slowly. Do you mind my taking your arm? I am blind in the dark, blinder than most persons, and although this coast is chiefly sand there are a few rocks in unexpected places." The girl extended her hand.

With a groan at Gill's words, Allan Drain half arose to a sitting posture.

"Don't be so sensible; I realize that it would be more intelligent to tramp about until we get rid of the stiffness from our cramped position in the boat and until I feel less like a wet blanket, yet the desire of my heart at present is to stretch out here by the fire and not to stir save to put on fresh firewood."

"Poor woodsman, how long would our few sticks last?" Gill remonstrated. "Be a man; if you won't come with me I shall have to go stumbling along in the dark, picking up more driftwood until we have a supply that will last all night. After a time we shall probably be too sleepy to exert ourselves. It is rather fun, isn't it, playing Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, when we cannot be more than a few miles from the house and the lagoon? At dawn we can reach home in an hour or so, but to go tramping about the island in the dark with no idea of the direction strikes me as the height of absurdity. I am sorry you do not like sensible persons, because I do try to be sensible on occasions. I suppose it is too much to expect of a poet. Come with me, please?"

"Did you suppose I would allow you to wander off alone, even if I am poet, or struggle to be one?" Allan Drain demanded, feeling Gill's slender fingers close firmly on his arm. "Do you know it never occurred to me that you and I would be friends, but after to-night I shall insist upon it, whether you like me or not. Don't dare say that I do not like sensible persons, I never liked anything better than the calm fashion in which you accept our dilemma, treating it as if it were rather a joke, than a disaster. Do you mind if I mention that you have not once suggested that there might be any gossip, or even discussion of the fact that you and I are forced to spend the night, in this—in this—well, in this informal fashion."

Gill laughed and stumbled a little, her companion promptly assisting her.

"Of course I have thought of it, but it makes no difference. This is no special virtue on my part; as soon as we are able to explain, none of the house party will consider the subject again. Yet I believe I am capable of going ahead in this world and doing what I think right, even if people should talk. Perhaps I am mistaken, one really never knows about oneself. Isn't that a log I fell over a moment ago? If you take one end and I the other it will burn a long time. Then in case any one comes to look for us they can discover us by the sign of the red flower."

"Red flower? What are you talking about?" Allan Drain said irritably, feeling uninterested in further physical exertion, now that he had landed Gill safely on the island and had only to wait a few hours before they could row or walk home.

"Wait until I can tell you," Gill answered.

A few moments after, when they had carefully laid the old log, cast up on the island after voyaging upon what unknown waters, on the camp fire and stood watching the flames leap up into the night, blue, rose and gold, Gill added:

"Did you not know that in the old days our forefathers called flame, the 'Red Flower'? If by any chance the tribal fire died out they went forth, sometimes to war, to steal the 'Red Flower' from the enemy."

Allan Drain remained silent.

Glancing at him and seeing his face lit by the glow, Gill was startled by his expression.

"You can't guess what you have just done for me? Oh, it may not seem of importance to you, and yet I can scarcely explain how much it means to me. For months and months I have been trying to find a title for my new play and now you have given me the perfect title: 'The Red Flower'. It's a wonder! The theme of my play is the flame of life that burns for good or ill in each one of us, and burns with greater beauty and purity in my heroine than in any one else.

"Forgive me, to think of my daring to talk of my play and myself (for at times they seem the same thing) with you here in the cold and dark, waiting for morning! Shall we continue to walk, or will you rest for a little, while I explore. It is possible I may find a more comfortable place than this for you."

Gill sat down, resting her chin in her hand and gazing into the fire. She could hear the waves lapping against the shore of the little island and behind her the wind rustling in the trees.

After to-night, surely she and Allan Drain must be good friends as he had stated. In any case her former prejudice against him was vanishing.

If he were willing to believe that this night's experience canceled the injury she had done him, the price was not severe.

Gill looked up at the stars; it must now be between two and three o'clock

in the morning. She only could hope that her Camp Fire guardian, her hostess and friends were not seriously troubled. This thought alone made her unhappy, although she was beginning to feel weary and lonely now that Allan Drain had disappeared, if only for a few moments.

"Miss Gilchrist, Gill," she heard him calling, using her diminutive name in his excitement for the first time in their acquaintance. "I have discovered a tiny house an eighth of a mile back from the shore, a fisherman's cottage I think it must be. I have noticed one or two of these huts when I have tramped over the island. It isn't clean and it is pretty dark, but it is under shelter and if you will go in and rest I'll keep guard outside until daylight."

Gill shook her head.

"Leave our fire and the stars and the outdoors? Thank you, no. We will sit here together and you won't mind if I doze now and then. See here, Mr. Drain, Allan Drain, when we met in the Adirondacks you did not like me because you thought I was like a boy. I know it is unattractive, but to-night suppose you try to think of me as a boy, as if we were two comrades who had met with an unexpected adventure, for which one was no more to blame than the other, and that we were both determined to make the best of it.

"If you don't mind sitting closer I'll lean against your shoulder a few moments. If I am a nuisance don't hesitate to say so."

In ten minutes Allan Drain discovered that his companion was asleep, this time in reality.

Her red-brown hair having tumbled partly down—Gill had unloosened it, so that it hung crisp and straight to her shoulders—her pallor seemed strangely to have departed with the night's adventure, or else her skin was warmed by the heat from the fire; her lips, irregular in shape, were slightly parted.

An interesting face, Allan Drain concluded, if not a beautiful one, and a nature, generous and faulty, which so far was not fully awakened. Doubtless she would fight valiantly for a friend, but might prove a formidable enemy.

Gill stirred, and without being aware of the fact her companion smiled.

After the night's experience would they be enemies or friends? He hoped and intended they should be friends, as he had announced earlier in the evening.

Few girls, in his estimation, possessed the gift for friendship. And personally there was no possibility of a relation deeper than friendship in his own life for many years; whether as a physician or a writer, he had a long and difficult road to travel before he could expect even a fair amount of wealth.

Now and then during the next few hours Allan dozed. Occasionally he would have to awaken Gill by rising and going forth in search of fresh firewood. At dawn they both opened their eyes at the same moment.

A mist was rising from the sea, curling heavenward and scattered by light

winds.

In the sky there was an indefinite, faint glow.

Later the clouds parted and Allan recalled his reading of the Iliad and Homer's description of Apollo and his immortal horses and chariot. Almost one could see them move across the sky trailing clouds of glory. Then the colors blended and day arrived.

In the interval neither Allan nor Gill spoke after their first good morning.

Finally Gill stood up, stretching out her arms, her face radiant.

"Never shall I forget the beauty of this dawn, never as long as I live. I had not thought to see the morning come up out of the ocean. I beg your pardon if I seem too enthusiastic; please remember that I was born and brought up in Kansas and an island in the midst of the sea is almost as thrilling an experience as the sight of a new planet. Now I'll descend to realities and go and wash my face in the salt water. Shall we walk or row back home? I'm starving, aren't you?"

"Then what do you say to remaining an hour longer and catching fish and frying them for breakfast? Perhaps I can find fishing tackle in the hut I stumbled into last night."

On the way to the water Gill called back over her shoulder.

"Don't tempt me, we must return as soon as possible."

"Then we will row home; it will be quicker and save the trouble of bringing the boat in later. Besides, how much more dignified to row calmly up the blue lagoon than to tramp across the island!"

Gill rejoined him and was attempting to fix her hair.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but there is nothing to suggest dignity in either one of us at present. I am judging by your appearance and guessing at my own."

"Sure you feel none the worse for the night outdoors?"

Then as she shook her head, Allan made no further comment, although conscious of the fact that few persons would have passed through the discomforts of such a night and on awaking make no reference to anything save the beauty of the morning.

There were a number of other circumstances Allan felt he would like to mention—the soreness of his arms and back, the stiffness of his legs, a general shiveriness and a sensation of not having been to sleep in ages. Yet in the face of Gill's better sporting instinct he declined to complain. The freshness and splendor of the dawn had brought a physical as well as spiritual exaltation.

Landing at the accustomed place in less than an hour, as they approached the old house no one appeared to be stirring except the birds in the eaves.

"Do you suppose by some good fortune no one has missed us? One scarcely knows whether to be pleased or chagrined. At least I shall awaken Bettina and recount our adventure. Good-by, I shall try to sleep most of the day and see you

to-night I hope.”

As Gill nodded her farewell, Allan left her at the door of the big house and went on to one of the cabins nearby, which was at present occupied by the half dozen masculine guests.

By this time it was approaching six o'clock and Gill discovered that one of the maids had unlocked the front door. Going in, she went directly to Bettina's room. When there was no immediate answer to her knock she walked quietly in.

Bettina sat up in bed, looking like a princess in a fairy tale with her two long braids of light hair falling over her shoulders and her nightdress of silk and lace. Notwithstanding Bettina's ideas of service and devotion to the less fortunate, her mother insisted, and Bettina was not unwilling, that she wear beautiful clothes. As her mother bought the clothes and gave them to her, Bettina had no alternative.

“Gill, what *is* the matter? Are you ill, do you need anything? Why you are dressed in the same frock that you wore last night at the dance.”

Bettina rubbed her eyes, becoming more aware of her surroundings, as Gill stood laughing and gazing down upon her.

“So this is what it means to be shipwrecked and spend the night on an island in the society of a poet? One returns to find one never has been missed.”

“Sit down, Gill, and talk sensibly. Shipwrecked? Island? Are you still dreaming? Did you not go up to your room last night before the dance was over and retire before the rest of us? When I found you had vanished, Sally told me that you had said you were tired and that no one was to pay any attention to you if you disappeared.”

“Yes, I did tell Sally that and was about to depart when Allan Drain asked me to go for a walk with him. Afterwards we went to row for a half hour on the lagoon, managed to slip into the bay and, when the tide turned, were carried farther out. We discovered the island, but not the blue lagoon and were forced to wait until daylight. I am sorry, I realized when it was too late that I should not have gone, but tried to make the best of it and to accept the situation in a matter-of-fact fashion. I am going to bed now. Will you explain to your mother and Mrs. Burton that I'll go into the details of our adventure when I am not so tired. At least the thing I feared did not occur, you were not frightened and did not believe the water had swallowed us up.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE FOLLOWING DAY

Not in several years could Sally Ashton recall so trying a day as the present one, not since those fateful days in France when she had nursed an unknown soldier in a ruined château.

In the first place, she was worried about Gill. Characteristic of Gill to insist that the night outdoors in the fog and cold probably had been good for her; Sally was not under a similar impression. Devotedly and faithfully she had nursed and watched the other girl during the past winter, to discover that Gill possessed a boyish carelessness and lack of judgment concerning her own health.

So in and out of Gill's room, Sally spent a portion of her morning, carrying in the breakfast tray, insisting that Gill, in spite of her protests, use a hot water bag prevent her taking cold.

At eleven o'clock again she tiptoed softly back, and finding Gill awake departed to bring a glass of milk, in case she should prefer to sleep on through luncheon.

"I may not be able to come in to see you during the afternoon, Gill; Bettina suggests that, as she is your hostess, I might permit her to have a little of the care of you, so I agreed. There is something else I may have to attend to and you seem all right."

With a harrassed, even troubled air, unlike her usual serenity, Sally stood frowning, looking not at Gill, but out the open window.

Gill stretched forth her hand.

"Sally, dear, what is the matter? You are not worrying about me, that is too absurd! You are a perfect dear and I am everlastingly grateful, but I have not even taken cold. There is something else on your mind. If you don't wish to confide in me, why not tell some one, Mrs. Graham or Mrs. Burton."

Sally failed to lift her eyes.

"No, not at present. I had thought of speaking to Aunt Betty and then decided I had best wait. Tante is absolutely out of the question. By the way, she was much upset when she heard what had happened to you and Allan Drain, but after a talk with Allan is in a happier frame of mind. I was to tell you that she would see you when you were more rested."

Sally waited, as if trying to reach a decision before stirring from her present position.

"Gill, if there was something you believe you ought to do, would you go ahead, even if it made some one you cared for angry?" she unexpectedly demanded.

Gill studied her closely.

"I don't know what to answer, as would depend partly upon circumstances. But, Sally, dear, please don't get yourself into any difficulty. You have been through a trying winter with me and are here by the blue lagoon for a holiday."

Sally shook her head.

"I'll do my best to avoid it."

A few moments before lunch Sally discovered Dan Webster alone on the front porch and went toward him in her sweetest and most friendly fashion.

"It is nice to find you by yourself, Dan. You said last night that I had been avoiding you, which was not exactly true. I have had something on my mind and it is hard, as you know, at a house party, to slip away from the others."

Dan laughed.

"Yes, Sally, but it is the very fact of your slipping away from the others that I did object to. Had you gone with me I might have felt differently."

Sally put out her hand, catching at her companion's coat sleeve.

"Promise me, Dan, that if I do something you don't like, you won't be angry? You might have a little faith in me!"

Dan shook his head.

"Faith or no faith, Sally, I won't have you trudging over this island alone on any kind of fool's errand. If you do what I asked you not, I shall find it hard to forgive you. Let's not talk of this; why not come for a walk with me this afternoon? We have not had a walk in ages!"

"No, Dan, I can't, I am sorry, but I am tired from waiting on Gill all morning and from the dance last night and mean to have a nap."

Then to Sally's relief, Mrs. Graham appeared on the veranda and luncheon was announced.

In the afternoon from her bedroom window Sally saw most of the house party disappear. They were crossing over to the mainland to watch a drill at the fort. She had declined to go, but was happy to observe that Dan was with them and walking with Vera Lagerloff, whom he had known since they were children.

A short time after, making a pretence of keeping her word, Sally lay down on her bed for five minutes. Then she arose, put on a sweater and a small, close-fitting hat and unobserved went downstairs. Instead of going out at once, however, she slipped into the drawing-room and sat down by a window where she was almost completely concealed by the curtain.

She sat there about a half hour. At the end of that time another member of the house-party appeared from a side door, glanced about her, as if wondering whether she was observed, and then started alone, presumably for a walk.

Not at once, but within two or three moments, Sally arose and followed her. By walking rapidly she might be able to join her; by loitering she might keep her in view.

As the girl walked quickly and as Sally was not fond of strenuous exercise, she was forced to hurry in order not to lose sight of her.

After an hour and a quarter of fast walking the girl in advance reached the small fisherman's hut which Allan Drain had discovered the night before.

She remained waiting in the open doorway until a small boat landed on the beach and a young man jumped out. Then she ran forward to meet him.

From her place of concealment behind a clump of trees Sally was neither surprised nor shocked. There was no question with regard to the likeness between Juliet Temple and her companion, plainly they were sister and brother. Then why did Juliet Temple not bring her brother to the "House by the Blue Lagoon"? The question puzzled and troubled Sally.

After all, she was making a mistake. If another girl chose to have secret meetings with her own brother, it was not her affair.

Had she not always distrusted Juliet Temple and believed she intended some wrong purpose, never would she have pursued her present course.

Dan must never learn what she had been doing, or he might be not only angry but disdainful.

Sally turned and started home, sitting down now and then to rest. Having finally made up her mind to cease playing detective, she was in a more comfortable frame of mind.

Should Juliet Temple by any chance overtake her, Sally determined to confess.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INTERVIEW

Seated on a log and looking out toward the water, hearing some one coming up behind her, not anxious to begin an interview which might lead to uncomfortable explanations, Sally did not turn her head.

When some one called her name, she jumped quickly to her feet and swinging around, faced Dan Webster.

Instantly her face grew scarlet.

"You have followed me, Dan. I shall never forgive you. Deliberately you made a pretence of going away with the others for the afternoon in order that I might be deceived."

Sally's words were harsher than her manner, for even as she spoke she put her hands to her hot cheeks and her voice trembled.

Dan was looking at her as she never had seen him. His usually ruddy, freshly colored skin had lost nearly every vestige of color, his lips were set and hard and his blue eyes at once stern and unhappy.

"Certainly I followed you, Sally, I told you that was my intention, and you are perfectly right in your supposition that I tricked you by appearing to leave the island. I did this not because I really believed you would continue your secret meetings, but because I wanted to be convinced."

"Secret meetings!" Sally exclaimed, moving backwards a step or two and dropping her hands at her sides. "I think it is my right, Dan, to ask what you mean."

"Why, I mean what I said. How could I mean anything else? Please don't make things worse by failing to tell the truth, particularly now when it is too late to do anything else. I have been tramping about for the past half hour trying to decide what was best. I am going directly to Tante, and I wish you would come with me, and tell her that you have had half a dozen secret meetings with a young fellow who lands on the island in an out-of-the-way spot, instead of using the lagoon where he could be seen from the house. Doubtless you will explain your reason."

Sally was silent, her face now paler than her companion's.

"Of course I know, Sally, there is no harm in what you have been doing, but you yourself will confess that it does not look well and that anyone who cares for you has a right to try to protect you from your own indiscretion. Who is this fellow? Is he some friend whom you don't think the rest of us would care to know? And for what reason? I saw you stop behind a clump of trees and a few moments later his boat landed and I walked away. I did not wish actually to spy upon you. You must only have spoken to him, as it was a brief time ago. Perhaps you are befriending this fellow in some way; if you are, why not let me help?"

"I am befriending no one," Sally returned.

"Then come with me to Tante. Perhaps you will confide in your Camp Fire guardian. I was never so disappointed in any human being in my life, Sally, as I am in you. I feel as if I were in a nightmare from which I must wake up."

Almost roughly Dan took Sally by the arm.

The next instant she had broken away and a second time seated herself on the log.

"Go and tell whom you like, Dan Webster, and whatever you like, and not only Tante, but Aunt Betty and the entire group of Camp Fire girls. Be sure to miss no one. Afterwards don't speak to me again."

Hesitating, his sternness slightly relaxed, as whose would not have been



"I Was Never So Disappointed in Any Human Being in My Life, Sally, As I Am in You."

by the sight of Sally, Dan took one step in her direction and then paused. Unexpectedly her head went down, the golden brown eyes that had been so full of defiance the moment before, filled and brimmed over, as she buried her head in her hands.

He was under the impression that he had been sufficiently unhappy upon making the discovery that she was keeping a secret from her friends, but his past unhappiness was as nothing to this.

"Sally, dear, I am afraid I spoke rudely to you. You know I was concerned for your sake. Of course I am not going to speak of the matter to Tante, as you'll tell her yourself at once."

"I shall do no such thing, Dan," Sally answered in a muffled tone.

Dan appeared and felt defeated.

Slowly he began walking up and down a few feet away, his head bowed, an expression of anxiety and depression on his handsome, boyish face.

Finally he came and stood in front of the girl.

"Sally, I want to apologize to you, you must do what you think best. You asked me to have faith in you and I have not had. Good-by. I won't ask you to

walk home with me, but come soon, dear, you are tired and upset and ought to rest before dinner.”

Dan was moving away when Sally caught up with him.

”Dan, please listen. I want to tell you what actually has happened, I never wanted to tell anyone anything so much in my whole existence. I am afraid you will think I have not behaved very well, but you may scold as much as you like because I agree with you.

”Of course I have not been meeting any strange youth for any purpose whatsoever. What I have been doing is following Juliet Temple and I have little excuse to offer.

”Soon after her arrival I noticed that she slipped off several times alone and one day I followed her, partly from curiosity and the old distrust I always have felt for her. It is a curious thing, Dan. I believe Juliet is honestly fond of Tante, but I think in the end she will use her for her own purpose.

”Well, Juliet went farther than I expected and I saw her meet some one whom I feel sure is her brother, as they look so exactly alike. Besides, I heard that he was a soldier and most of the time he is in uniform. It is Juliet’s affair of course and she probably has some legitimate excuse for not wishing us to know him, but I confess it troubles me.

”In a way I feel I owe an apology to Juliet, but it might be more comfortable for us both not to speak of it. I was just reaching a decision to forget the whole matter when you interrupted and frightened me. If you doubt what I have told you, Dan, you can wait until Juliet returns and tell her what I have told you. I would prefer she and Tante should both know than that you should doubt me.”

”But I don’t doubt your word, Sally; nothing would ever induce me to doubt you now or in the future,” Dan returned with more earnestness than his previous point of view gave him the excuse for possessing. ”Besides, now I recall that twice I have seen Juliet Temple not far away, soon after observing you. I am a dunce and a blockhead and your devoted friend, Sally.

”Why in the world do you feel this distrust of Juliet Temple? No wonder Tante thinks she has a hard time among you girls and appeals to me to be kind to her. She seems to me a tiresome kind of girl, who isn’t capable of anything out of the ordinary. She is clever enough to be a good secretary, or companion, or whatever she is to Tante, and that is the end of it.”

”Think so, Dan? Well, perhaps you are right,” Sally replied. ”Suppose we hurry home. I don’t wish to appear as if you had made me cry, although it is perfectly true that you have.”

”Never as long as we live shall I trouble you again.”

Wise in things feminine, Sally shook her head and smiled.

CHAPTER XV

TWISTED COILS

"If you can finish, Juliet, without further assistance from me, I believe I will go and look for the Camp Fire girls. They have been so busy with their own affairs of late, I feel slightly neglected. Then do take a walk, or lie down, whichever you prefer. You have been looking a little nervous and pale of late. I would understand if you had been working hard, but we both have been having a holiday."

Mrs. Burton stood before her mirror making soft little pats at her hair, characteristic of all girls and women.

She had on a house dress of crepe de chine in a curious shade of old gold with a girdle of brown velvet.

"I can't become accustomed to my appearance in this dress, Juliet. It seems to me I look rather worse than usual. I wish it were becoming to you so I might present it to you, but I am afraid the color is wrong."

Juliet Temple made no reply and seemed scarcely to have heard what had been said to her. She was seated at a desk with several bills and a check book before her.

As Mrs. Burton, preparing to leave the room, opened the door, she said in a low tone:

"Would you mind signing these checks before you go? One is for the rent of the apartment."

"Tante, won't you come for a ride with us around the island? We won't be long!" Bettina Graham called at the same instant from outside in the hall.

"Wait a moment, dear, and I'll join you. Give me the checks, Juliet, please. What an abominable pen! Are the three all you wish me to sign?"

"Yes, all for the present," Juliet answered, gathering them hastily together and placing one over the other.

At the same time Mrs. Burton went out of the room.

"I don't feel like driving, Bettina. I was intending to see what you girls were doing and perhaps have an impromptu Camp Fire meeting. We have been neglecting our Council meetings of late and it is not a good plan, yet I know it is difficult with so many masculine guests to be entertained. Who is going for the

drive?"

"Oh, no one except my shadows, as you call my two small girls, and David Hale and Marguerite Arnot. Marguerite has been so busy helping mother look after the house she and David have scarcely been able to exchange a word, and you know I always have wished them to be friends. Mother said she would go if you liked, but not otherwise."

"Are the other girls here? I'll find mother when she has rested, I know this is the hour she lies down."

"Yes, I think they are in the house somewhere. I am not sure about Sally. I heard Dan ask her to go for a row and heard Sally decline, but she may have changed her mind, even Sally sometimes does change her mind—for Dan.

"I must hurry, but if you pass my room, dear, will you look at the old English prints that father found and presented me for my sitting-room. They are so lovely I feel mother should have them, but she insists not."

Bettina ran off down the stairs and Mrs. Burton moved toward the front of the old house, where Bettina's apartment of bedroom and sitting-room was located.

Coming toward her through the hall with a book under his arm was Allan Drain.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Burton, if I am intruding by being up here, when I know this second floor is the feminine part of the house, but Miss Bettina told me I could get this book from her bookcase. I was trying to escape without being discovered."

The Camp Fire guardian laughed.

"Oh, the situation is not so serious as that. You need not run away. Stop a moment, won't you? I want to speak to you. I have been intending to for the past ten days. I am afraid you think I am unkind and selfish not to allow you to read your new play to me. I know Mrs. Graham tried to explain as pleasantly as possible, but the fact remains that I did refuse, even when she asked me and I don't like to refuse her many things. I was tired; you see I have not acted for a number of years and the past winter was a good deal of a strain. Besides, I am the poorest kind of a critic! I want you to know that I trust your play will be a great success, and if not this, then the next one. It is a long and oftentimes difficult road you have started to travel, yet I presume it is like acting, if the thing is in your blood, you must keep at it through good and ill. Forgive me and understand my attitude. I am afraid I am growing more selfish as I grow older, but I don't wish you to feel this all unkindness, I might have to say something discouraging and I might be wrong and then I should have hurt you for nothing."

Polly Burton held out her hand in the simple, friendly fashion characteristic of her. As the young fellow took it and held it for an instant she saw in his face

the beauty and honor of a sincere and ardent admiration, not for her as a woman, but as an artist.

"Thank you," he returned, "I do understand and I have not the least right to trouble you. You have been too kind in the past. The road is hard because I have my living to make and cannot afford to work and wait as one should. I only trust I have the courage to hold out."

Waiting for Mrs. Burton to move away, his eyes never left her, consciously studying the slender, graceful figure, the small head with its mass of dark hair and the brilliant blue eyes, the mark of her Irish inheritance, yet of less interest than the long, too thin face, with the pointed chin and the irregular, deeply colored lips.

"Have you a name for your play? The title is so important. I hated the title of mine last winter, in spite of its Shakespearean significance it was too difficult to say, 'A Tide in the Affairs'."

"Yes, I think I have. Only the other night Miss Gilchrist, Gill, gave it to me by accident while we waited for the coming of morning by our Camp Fire. She spoke of flame as 'The Red Flower'. Do you like it, 'The Red Flower', as a title?"

Mrs. Burton uttered a little exclamation.

"Yes, I do, immensely. See here, Allan, would you like to compromise with me and allow me to read your play to myself. If I like it I shall tell you so; if I don't I shall say nothing, so as not to influence you. In any case I should prefer not having you read it aloud. Most persons read so poorly and if they don't, it is more confusing. I can get my own impression much better if I am alone and it is under my own eyes."

Allan gripped the mahogany post of the balustrade until the veins stood up on his hands.

"You mean you really will read it? Of course I should rather you would read it to yourself. I should be sure to make a wreck of it. Yet I ought not to be such a nuisance, and please don't think I expect you to say anything good of it."

Again Mrs. Burton laughed.

"Look here, Allan, I know the artistic temperament too well to be deceived by you. You don't mind being a nuisance one bit if you can have your own way, no one of us artists minds. And, my dear boy, of course you expect me to say your play is good; if you did not, you would never allow me to look at it. You expect this one moment and the next you are in utter despair because you are convinced it is the poorest play ever written or conceived.

"I'll do my best for you, only you must not worry if I am rather a time getting at it. I must rest and forget the theater for a little longer."

"I shall wait forever, if you desire and be everlastingly grateful always," Allan said so fervently that Polly Burton, recalling her own youth had an emotion

of sympathy and determined not to keep him waiting for her judgment for any great length of time.

Bettina's sitting-room door was open and the moment after she went in and stood looking about the room.

Youth was always hard to understand, even if it understood itself, which it never does.

Here was Bettina's little apartment as exquisite as any girl could dream of, or desire. The rugs were of a wonderful blue, the color she loved best, the walls more lightly colored, the furniture not the massive mahogany of most old southern houses, but of an English design, the famous Chippendale. Outside her windows Bettina had a view of the blue lagoon and the wider bay beyond. Yet she preferred to leave all this beauty and luxury and spend her life in the slums.

"Well, life is only an expression of human personality, and if Bettina is in earnest, she has the right to do what she wishes," Mrs. Burton thought, as she picked up one of the prints Bettina had asked her to examine.

As she stood holding it in her hand she heard Alice Ashton and Vera Lagerloff talking together in the adjoining room with the door between partly open.

"Don't you think, Vera, that one or the other of us should go at once to Aunt Patricia? I know she said neither of us was to come, but that does not alter our responsibility. She must need some one."

Mrs. Burton put down the picture she scarcely had seen and took a step forward, then paused.

"It is so impossible to think of Aunt Patricia as poor, isn't it? Ever since we have known her she has been lavishing her wealth in every direction, upon every one except herself. It is like her now to declare that she has paid the rent of our little New York apartment for a year and that we are not to think of making any changes before then. Don't you suppose we can persuade her to come and live with us for the present at least until she decides what she wishes to do permanently?" Vera suggested.

"Yes, but Aunt Patricia insists she is going to find work, that at last she is glad she never has had a gray hair. She seems really not to be so unhappy over the situation as we are for her. Her only fear apparently is that we shall take Tante into our confidence concerning her. And frankly this makes me uncomfortable! I think Tante should be told. But I shall leave you to talk the matter over with Aunt Betty. I am going to Boston in the morning. I shall see father and mother and ask them to go with me to Aunt Patricia's house, it is just outside of town. Then we can face the situation together."

"An excellent idea, Alice, but I shall go in your place. I have just overheard what you and Vera were saying. As you were speaking of Aunt Patricia and I

think it my right to know of her, notwithstanding her attitude toward me, I made no effort not to hear.

"Now, please tell me in detail so far as you know what has occurred."

An instant Alice Ashton hesitated, but there was something in her Camp Fire guardian's manner and expression that commanded obedience. Very seldom in her life had she assumed this attitude, when she did, no one dreamed of opposing her.

"Why, yes, Tante, I'll tell you and am very glad to be relieved of the responsibility. This morning unexpectedly Vera and I received a long letter from Aunt Patricia. We had not heard in several weeks. In the letter she explains that she had been intending to write for some time, but was waiting until she understood more definitely what condition her affairs were in. She stated that she had known for some time that she had been spending too much money and had drawn upon her capital, as well as using her entire income. Her lawyer has told her several times that she must retrench, but being Aunt Patricia she had paid no attention to him. Well, the climax came when Aunt Patricia learned that the home she is erecting for war orphans in France is to cost double what she had expected it would cost. The fault has been chiefly her own; she has been adding all kinds of things, playgrounds and an outdoor school and a specially fitted-up hospital for the children in a separate building. You may know more than I do about it.

"When she went to her lawyers with the information that she required twice the sum she originally told them to raise, they declared this could not be accomplished without leaving her virtually penniless. She too had been buying oil stock like the rest of the world, hoping to gain more money for her orphans and the stock had turned out to be worthless.

"Aunt Patricia does not seem to care a great deal. She announces that she has secured the necessary money for her war orphans and the building will be completed with all the recent improvements. She apologizes because she will not have the money to allow Vera and me continue our college course when this year is over. Neither will she be able to keep up her place in Boston, but this is incidental."

"Oh, that will make no special difference to Aunt Patricia, as she never has been fond of the place. It was her brother's home and they were very different characters. She will live with me in the future."

Observing Vera and Alice exchange a glance, Mrs. Burton smiled.

"You don't believe she will consent to this, do you, considering the fact that she has declined to speak to me for nearly a year? Nevertheless I assure you she will. It is not worth while for you to accompany me, Alice; I prefer to go to Boston alone. I shall bring Aunt Patricia here until we make our summer plans.

I must find Mrs. Graham now and learn whether Aunt Patricia has written her. Good-by."

A moment later the two friends met face to face.

"I have been looking for you in your own room, Polly. Come into my room, won't you? I have just received a surprising letter from Aunt Patricia in which she insists I am not to confide her misfortune to you. This is nonsense, when you are the one person in the world who can give her the affection and help she requires. I don't believe Aunt Patricia will care particularly for the loss of her fortune if the loss restores you to her."

"Thank you, Betty, dear, you need feel no anxiety. Now that I may be able to do something for Aunt Patricia, and not accept everything from her, I have not the least idea of permitting her to behave in her old, obstinate, absurd fashion. Thank goodness, we shall be friends soon again; no one dreams how much I have missed her during this past winter!"

"You don't think Aunt Patricia will refuse to see you?"

Polly Burton shook her head.

"I don't care in the least if she does refuse at first. There are occasions, Betty, dear, when you know I can be as obstinate a woman as Aunt Patricia Lord. I shall be away about five days. You will let me bring her back with me?"

CHAPTER XVI THE DISAPPEARANCE

"Juliet Temple has not returned, Sally. Mother feels uneasy and told me to ask if you knew anything of her plans. We feel especially responsible now that Tante is away, as she made it a point that we were to look after Juliet while she was gone and see that she was not lonely."

"Why, what has happened, Bettina?" Sally inquired serenely. "I am sure you have been more than attentive for the past few days."

The long twilights were beginning and with dinner over, Sally and Dan were sitting in the hammock under the linden trees, one of Sally's favorite resorts.

The other members of the house party were in the garden, where already a few tiny spears were appearing from seeds planted but a brief time ago, so swift had been the arrival of the heat that of late there had been days more like summer than spring.

"Well, perhaps Juliet was so bored with my society that she has preferred to run away. She told mother this morning that she wished to go to the mainland on the early boat and would be away all day. Mother made a point of making her promise to return in the afternoon. But now the last boat has come and gone and there is no chance of her reaching the island until to-morrow, unless some friend brings her across, which does not seem probable. We might go over in the motor launch and search for her, but discovering her would be another matter."

"Didn't Juliet intend to spend the night away from the island?" Sally inquired. "Otherwise why did she take her suit case? I saw her starting off with it."

"She wished to bring back her purchases and said she thought this would be the simplest method of carrying them. I declare I don't know what we ought to do. I would not for a great deal have Juliet in any difficulty; the very fact that Tante thinks we do not like her would make me more uncomfortable if matters have gone wrong."

"Is there anything I can do to be useful?" Dan asked. "Tell Aunt Betty that of course I am at her service."

There was in Dan's manner a constraint that puzzled Bettina, while Sally continued to rock idly to and fro, Dan having risen on Bettina's arrival.

"You seem remarkably uninterested, Sally," she declared with unusual irritability, since ordinarily Bettina possessed a fine self-control.

"Sorry," Sally answered calmly, "but you see, my dear, I have a conviction that Juliet Temple is well able to take care of herself. Suppose we walk to the house, so that Dan may ask Aunt Betty if she wishes him to do anything in the matter.

"You and I might go up to Juliet's room and investigate. Endeavor to discover if she has taken any of her belongings which might give one the idea that she planned to be away over night."

"Oh, very well, Sally, although it seems unnecessary. If Juliet wished to remain away who would or could have objected, so what possible reason for secrecy? Being a determined person, however, perhaps I had best do as you say.

"Dan, you will find mother in the drawing-room. Ask her to take no steps until Sally and I report any discovery we may make. Has it ever occurred to you that Sally is under the impression she has a gift for detective work?"

Her speech was a perfectly idle one so Bettina was puzzled to observe Sally blush uncomfortably and lower her eyes, while Dan said "No" in an annoyed tone.

Ten minutes after, the two girls were standing facing each other in Juliet Temple's room, which adjoined Mrs. Burton's larger one.

"Really, Sally dear, I do not like to peer into Juliet's private closet or bureau drawers. Would you mind looking first, since after all I am her hostess and you

are not.”

Sally smiled the demure smile with which she covered a number of situations.

”So, Bettina, you wish me to do something you have an aversion to doing yourself? Never mind, I don’t particularly object and you do. Besides, the suggestion originated with me and if I am right or wrong, I shall summon the courage to confess to Juliet, although I shall not enjoy it. I shall tell her that Aunt Betty was uneasy and we thought perhaps she had arranged to spend the night with friends and used this method to find out.”

So saying, Sally drew forth the top drawer of the mahogany chest of drawers, then a second and a third drawer; each and every one was entirely empty.

Without comment the two girls walked across the room and together unfastened the closet door; not a dress or garment of any kind hung inside.

”Sally, Juliet does not intend to return! *Why*, I don’t understand, we have done our best to be courteous and she might at least have said good-by. I presume she has gone to Tante’s New York apartment. Do you think we should telegraph and say she is no longer here.”

Sally shook her head.

”Not for the present, but of course we must tell Aunt Betty and Dan and learn their opinion. Wait another moment, please.”

Returning to the empty drawers, Sally began searching diligently underneath the neatly folded papers lining each one. Finally she removed them.

”I thought it barely possible Juliet might have left a note for Tante. She understands that she is to return in another thirty-six hours and probably would wish to explain to her.”

”Here is a letter, Sally, addressed to Mrs. Richard Burton and sealed with sealing wax!” Bettina exclaimed, having answered Sally’s suggestion by entering the adjoining room and slipping her hand under one of the pillows of Mrs. Burton’s bed.

”I presume this letter does inform Tante why Juliet found existence with the Camp Fire girls by the blue lagoon so disagreeable that she could not endure the experience during the week of her absence. Well, I am just as glad we discovered the letter and grateful to you, Sally, for the idea. I never have pretended that you do not understand human nature better than the rest of us, although no one would guess the fact except through long acquaintance with you. Juliet, I suppose, never dreamed that we would search Tante’s bed for the concealed letter and so believed it would not be unearthed until her return. I don’t know what gave me the inspiration to look there? Personally I wish Juliet had vanished from Tante’s life for all time, rather than until the close of her visit to us. Let us go down to the drawing-room and make our report. I’ll bear the letter with me

and see if mother thinks we should dare open it.”

”No, I do not consider it wise to open Polly’s letter,” Mrs. Graham stated ten minutes later. ”She is so unnecessarily sensitive about the girl, I don’t wish her to feel that we regard Juliet’s behavior as more than ordinarily discourteous. I am relieved that she planned her disappearance, so she is not in any trouble. Polly will decide what is best when she learns what Juliet wishes her to know. Put the letter in Polly’s room, please, Bettina, dear, not under her pillow, that seems to imply secrecy; lay it upon her desk where she will be apt to observe it soon after her arrival. Thank goodness, she will be at home after another day and two nights. She has been with me so little in the past years I begrudge the loss of each day.”

Bettina sat down on the arm of her mother’s chair.

”Is Aunt Patricia coming with Tante, mother, you have not said?”

”Yes, I think so, I have had a room made ready, although in Polly’s last letter Aunt Patricia still seemed to be arguing the question. I never have had much doubt, however, that she finally would do what Polly insists upon.

”However, the battle will not be severe, as Aunt Patricia is longing to surrender.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN

The entire house party was down at the landing to meet the little boat which was to bring the Camp Fire guardian back to the ”House by the Blue Lagoon.”

She was seen standing on the deck looking younger and sligher than ever with Miss Patricia Lord’s tall, gaunt figure beside her.

The instant the boat reached the shore, after receiving an enthusiastic welcome, Alice Ashton and Vera Lagerloff took Miss Patricia by the arm in an effort to separate her from the others, while Bettina, Sally, Mary Gilchrist, Marguerite Arnot and the two younger girls, Elce and Maida, surrounded Mrs. Burton.

Mrs. Graham seized the opportunity to whisper as she kissed her friend.

”Hail, the conquering hero comes, Polly!” to have the other woman murmur:

”Oh, do be careful, please, Betty. I’ll tell you everything when we are alone. You don’t know what I have been through and how little like a conqueror I feel.”

Then Mrs. Graham left her and supplanted Alice by Miss Patricia's side.

"Don't you think Polly is looking pretty well, Aunt Patricia?"

Pausing in her long strides, Miss Patricia frowned.

"Fairly well, better perhaps than I expected, but never so strong as we would have her, Betty. However, she is a wilful woman and it cannot be helped. It has nearly broken my heart, Betty, to have been separated from her so long, and the fault was altogether her own. Polly agrees that it was."

"Certainly, Aunt Patricia, if you and Polly feel this to be true, I have no thought of differing with you. Here is David Hale wanting to speak to you. Bet-tina and I gave our masculine guests the instruction this morning that they were to keep in the background until we were allowed to welcome you. You and David are such old friends he seems not to intend to wait his turn."

"I insist that Miss Patricia allow me to carry her bag. I have seen her decline to allow Miss Ashton or Miss Lagerloff to touch it, but whether it contains bonds or precious stones I will not run away with it, Aunt Patricia."

Entering her own room, followed by Mrs. Graham and Miss Lord, Mrs. Burton moved quickly across and opened the door of the room adjoining.

She then turned:

"Betty, where is Juliet? I wondered why she did not come to meet me with the other girls and now she is not in her room. Is anything the matter?"

Picking up the letter from the desk Mrs. Graham extended it toward her friend.

"I don't think so, Polly, although I scarcely know. Juliet Temple left here without telling me that she intended to leave; it was only a day or so ago and we decided it best to await your return. The letter she addressed to you will probably explain. We concluded that she was homesick without you here and has gone to your apartment."

"I am sorry, Betty, I am afraid Juliet has not been polite, when I especially asked your permission to allow her to join us.

"Juliet Temple has written me that she has forged my check for two thousand five hundred dollars and has gone with her brother to Canada. She is perfectly frank, poor child, and tells how and why. The fault is partly through my carelessness! A few days before I left Juliet asked me to sign a check for two hundred and fifty dollars for the rent of my New York apartment. I was in a hurry at the time and I believe took her word for it and did not look at the check. She tells me she had so arranged that she could change the amount, which she did at once.

"Her brother was in the army and stationed not far from here. She has been in the habit of seeing him since we have been on the island. Juliet has always insisted that he was the one person in the world she cared for and that he had

given her nothing but sorrow. It seems that he has been committing a number of offences and expected to be court-martialed, but instead of submitting, had planned to desert. For his sake Juliet appears to have lost all sense of honor or duty toward me. She seems convinced that I will not prosecute her. She tells me she was leaving immediately for New York, where she will have the check cashed (she is in the habit of cashing my checks). Afterwards, she and her brother intend to make their home in Canada and never return to the United States! A pretty desperate situation, isn't it?"

"Yes, Polly, but I'll telegraph to Anthony in Washington and, if it can be accomplished, he will see that the girl is found and brought back. I am so distressed for you, it is such a large sum of money and you have trusted the girl so completely."

"Yes, Betty, but I don't want Juliet found and punished. I have no right to feel or behave like this and every one of you must say exactly what you like to me. I know I am absolutely wrong and that she ought to be made to suffer the legal penalty, but I simply haven't the force of character or the courage. I could not endure to think of a girl who has been so near me, who has lived as a member of my family and been good to me in many small ways, shut up in prison for the rest of her youth."

"Yes, Polly, I know, let us not talk of this now. Painful as it is, you cannot allow yourself to be so sentimental and cowardly, dear! Besides, the money is a great deal more than you and Richard can possibly afford to lose!"

"Goodness, I had forgotten that! It is not only *more* than we can afford to lose, it is nearly all the money we possess at present. Juliet must have known. We saved from the amount I earned last winter only what we thought sufficient to last through the summer, until I returned to work in the autumn; the rest Richard has devoted to the payments he and I feel called upon to make."

"Yes, and a nice time, Polly Burton, for you to assume the added responsibility of an old woman to support!" Miss Patricia said harshly.

"Do you think, Aunt Patricia, that this is the time for you to say unkind things to me? Don't you think I have a good deal to bear and that you might not make it harder?"

Too overcome to speak, Miss Patricia nodded and actually two tears rolled unchecked down her gaunt cheeks.

"I am afraid Richard will be terribly worried and annoyed over my carelessness," Mrs. Burton said childishly.

"Richard Burton! Let him dare utter a word! Who was it brought that unpleasant girl, whom I never liked at any time, into our home at Half Moon Lake? I remember his saying something or other about being a knight errant!" Miss Patricia snorted, and the girls, Polly Burton and Betty Graham broke into

hysterical laughter that saved the situation.

"I fear that from the first Juliet Temple realized that I was an easy person to deceive. In her letter she also confides the fact that when she told me she had been wrongfully accused in her office in Washington, she did this in order that I might be impressed with the idea that she would not have confessed had she been guilty.[*] Well, at least I rejoice that you girls were never deceived by her and that Juliet was never a member of our Sunrise Camp Fire. Let us speak of her as little as possible in the future."

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake."

"And Polly, you are not to worry over money; of course Anthony and I are not rich, but you may have anything that we possess. Why not make me the happiest of human beings and you and Aunt Patricia and Richard spend the summer here with me in the 'House by the Blue Lagoon'? You may do whatever you wish and we'll not trouble you," Mrs. Graham urged.

"You are an angel, Betty, but Aunt Patricia and Richard and I must hide somewhere where I can work and study, if I can find a play for next winter. Now may I lie down for a little while?"

A few moments later, in Miss Patricia's bedroom, she and her hostess continued the discussion.

"What do you think, Aunt Patricia? Ought we allow Polly to permit this girl to go free, in spite of her deceit and treachery?"

"I don't know what else is possible, Betty. Polly is wrong, she nearly always is wrong, and yet to punish the girl would have a most disastrous effect upon her. There is a sweetness about her and a generosity; Polly has been most generous and sweet to me, Betty, when I have behaved very badly and so I would not care to influence her, if I could, to be severe upon any one else."

"Don't, Aunt Patricia, speak of yourself in any such connection! But about the money, Polly will never allow us to help her. She never would accept anything from anyone save you, and now you can no longer afford to help."

A moment Miss Patricia sat crumpling a large, masculine-looking handkerchief in her capable hands, while a flush spread over her face that amazed her companion.

"Betty Graham, I desire to make a confession to you and to request you to keep my secret until such time as I may be willing to speak of it myself. The truth is I am not so poor as I have allowed you and Polly and the Camp Fire girls to believe. I have lost money, my home for French orphans is costing twice the

amount I had expected it would cost, and I have found it an excellent arrangement to rent my house near Boston and to live as economically as possible, but I am not a pauper. Now do use your intelligence and understand why I have wished you to be deceived.

"Apparently I had hopelessly estranged Polly and had reached a point where I could not any longer endure being apart from her. Some weeks ago she sent me word through Richard that never so long as she lived would she accept anything more at my hands and that she had entreated me to make friends with her for the last time. There are occasions you know when Polly can be singularly obstinate. So what was I to do? Appeal to her sympathy, make her believe there was something she could do for me. Mavourneen, I knew she would fly to my rescue. So I sent out the word and she came and now I shall be parted from her no more. But, Betty, my dear, Polly shall never suffer. Do not believe that I shall fail to keep sufficient money to see she has all she desires. For the present let us have our little house and our summer together and Polly the belief that she is caring for me. I shall dread the day when she learns what I have told you."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ETERNAL WAY

The Eternal Way lies before him,
 The Way that is made manifest in the Wise.
 The Heart that loves reveals itself to man,
 For now he draws nigh to the Source,
 The night advances fast,
 And lo! the moon shines bright.

"Will you come into the garden for a farewell talk with me, Bettina? You know, I leave for Washington in the morning."

"In a quarter of an hour, David. I must see that my two small girls are in bed before I join you. Suppose you wait for me on the beach near the sun dial."

The night was warm and instead of sitting down David Hale walked about, thinking of a very different garden where first he had met Bettina Graham, the "Queen's Secret Garden", near "The Little Trianon" in the great park at Versailles.

He remembered his own surprise upon discovering an American girl half asleep in the shadow of a group of statuary and startled into wakefulness by his unexpected approach.

So their acquaintance had begun in a romantic setting that David thought never to find repeated. To-night he was by no means sure the surroundings were not equally lovely.

The moon was rising before the afterglow had wholly faded. A light breeze made the delicate green leaves rustle on a hundred nearby trees, the magnolias were in bloom over the entire island, scenting the night air with their heavy, tropical fragrance.

In the moonlight and the last of the purple twilight, David Hale was devoting little attention to these details. He was thinking with the concentration over which he had a special mastery, of something he wished to say to Bettina Graham and of how he had best say it.

She waved a long blue scarf as she came running down the path toward him.

"I did not keep you waiting long, David, did I? I am sorry you must go tomorrow, but then the house party will break up in another week or ten days and I am returning to New York. After all, it is a shorter journey for you to come back to the 'House by the Blue Lagoon' than for me, and you know mother and Marguerite Arnot are always pleased to see you. I wish I could reach here so easily; for a number of reasons it is going to be very hard to leave the island, our island. I have a fashion of saying 'our island' over again to myself every now and then because it seems so incredible that we can own such an exquisite spot and that it is no farther away from the outside world. Why, except that it is not tropical, we might almost deceive ourselves into believing that we were on one of the south sea islands!"

"Then why do you go, Bettina, unless you wish? There certainly can be no other reason and your mother will be distressed at your departure. It is so impossible for me to understand your point of view. Your home is here and no other place can be so beautiful!"

"I know, David," Bettina answered gently, "and yet I have tried so often to explain to you and to other people: beautiful as this place is and loving it as I do, yet my work and life are no more here than your own. You are going back to Washington, David; you are very ambitious and some day intend to have a political career. Suppose this were your home instead of mine, would you stay here always? Would you give up your work and your ambition and your future to live in an island of dreams?"

"No, of course you would not? Then why do you think I should? Oh, I know the answer, I have gone into the subject so many times—because I am a

girl and there is no reason why I should devote myself to social work, when my father is a man of prominence and some wealth and my mother all that is sweet and charming and popular. I am not going to talk about myself, only you do know my reason and you could understand my point of view if you would make the effort. Instead of caring less for my work after a few months of effort and experience, I care more than at the beginning.”

”I am sorry, Bettina.”

Bettina laughed.

”Why should you be? Mother and father are becoming more reconciled.”

She and David had not ceased walking now they stopped and Bettina leaned over the sun dial.

”I am glad our garden boasts a sun dial, as it would not be half so picturesque without, yet the inscription is curious and taken from an ancient Japanese poem, which would seem to make it a moon dial and appropriate tonight, David. I can repeat it because I think I know the poem by heart:

”The Eternal Way lies before him,
The Way that is made manifest in the Wise.
The Heart that loves reveals itself to man
For now he draws nigh to the Source,
The night advances fast,
And lo! the moon shines bright.

”See David, even in the poem the Way lies before *him*, not before *her*.”

”There is only one way that I wish lay before you, Bettina, the way of learning to care for me. Please don’t interrupt me, this cannot be altogether a surprise to you. I think I tried to make you see how I felt toward you at the beginning of our acquaintance, although I did my best to wait until your mother and father had learned to know something of me and until you were older. I would wait now if you were not becoming so absorbed in the work you have undertaken that I am afraid you will lose all interest in me. My dear Bettina, affection is the supreme thing and if you will only wait and have faith in me, some day I may be able to offer you a name and a future of which you may be proud.”

Bettina shook her head.

”David, I am glad you said this to me, as I wish to be perfectly frank. No, I am not altogether surprised, yet I am going to sound as if I were unappreciative and unkind. I not only don’t care for you in the way you desire, but I never could learn to care. I dread the whole thought of romance and sincerely hope it may never come into my life. I have my work and my family and friends and please

never speak of this again.”

”But if it should come, Bettina, when you are older and wiser and less self-absorbed, would I, could I have any chance with you then?”

”No, David Hale, never; from the first I have never wanted you to be anything but my friend. Please let me say good-by and good luck to you. There is some one else in the garden and I am afraid we might be overheard.”

”Good-night, and good-by for a long time, Bettina. I am sorry to have troubled you.”

As Bettina ran on, Robert Burton stepped in front of her.

”You are not going indoors on a night like this, Miss Graham! Why not stay and talk to me for a while? I don’t know what the other fellow has done to make you in such haste, but I shall try to be more agreeable. You have been very kind to have asked me here, but I have seen less of my hostess than I counted on seeing.

”Remember when we are back in New York you have promised to take me to one of your settlement houses and make me useful, if it is possible that an idle fellow like I am can be useful to anyone.”

”Yes, no, thank you, but I must go in,” Bettina protested. ”Nothing has happened, but I am in a good deal of a hurry. Why are you idle? Please understand I don’t wish you to help with the settlement work on my account, not unless you feel a deep interest in the work itself.”

”Yes? Well, that is one way of stating the case,” Robert Burton answered. ”Wasn’t I a good Samaritan when you were lost in New York?”

Bettina did not answer, already having vanished up the path toward the house.

At the same moment that Bettina was escaping in one direction, Mary Gilchrist was hurrying down the front lawn toward the lagoon in search of Allan Drain.

She was a good deal excited and considerably out of breath.

Allan appeared extremely comfortable lying on the bottom of the anchored boat with his face upturned to the sky.

”Oh, Allan, I have the most wonderful news for you!” Gill exclaimed, giving a flying leap and landing in the bottom of the boat which rocked dangerously at her descent.

”If you have, Gill, I think it your duty not to attempt to drown me before I am able to hear it,” Allan expostulated, straightening up and removing the sofa cushions upon which he had been resting and tossing one of them to Gill.

”Really, Gill, of late you have been returning to those boyish habits and manners which I found so reprehensible in you at the beginning of our acquaintance. After you have confided to me your thrilling information do you think

you can sit calm and speechless in this boat for the next half hour?

"I had escaped from the others in order to enjoy a little peace and solitude, which is so difficult to attain upon a house party. You may not have intended it, but at the instant you plunged into this boat I am under the impression that you destroyed an immortal sonnet. I cannot recall a line at present, that is why I feel so convinced it was immortal."

"A thousand times I crave your pardon, Allan Drain. You know I have a fashion of banishing your poetic muse. However, return to your poetizing, I can sit here in silence for a half hour or more *before* telling you my wonderful news just as readily as *after* telling it to you."

Five minutes passed.

Finally Allan yawned.

"See here, Gill, I think you might confide what you came to say. I have an idea that it is of small importance—girls' secrets usually are—but it bores me to have you sit there with your lips tightly pressed together, as if the words would rush through otherwise, and your face white and your eyes shining. If any good fortune has come to you, Gill, please tell me. You know how glad I shall be."

"The good fortune is not mine, it is yours, only it is mine also because I am so glad for you."

"Then let me hear what it is. I know you too well to believe you would try to deceive me," Allan answered, as if he were fighting against a hope he dared not permit himself to hold.

"It cannot be possible that Mrs. Burton has a good word to say for my play!"

"More than that, Allan, she is very enthusiastic. Now do keep still and I shall tell you everything I know. The night of her return to the 'House by the Blue Lagoon', Mrs. Burton was feeling restless and unhappy over something that was troubling her a great deal, and so was unable to sleep. She rose up out of bed and wrote a letter to her husband; when she had finished, as your play was in her desk, she picked it up and began looking it over, with no thought of actually reading it at the time. Something interested her, a line, or a character, and she read on until she had finished. When she lay the play down and turned off the electric light dawn had come. Still she remained unable to sleep."

"You mean she was thinking of my play?"

"Yes, Allan, I do mean that, she was thinking of it, but she was distrusting her own judgment and determined to wait until a day or more had passed in order to read the play again before arriving at a decision or speaking to any one concerning it.

"This afternoon she read it for the second time and after dinner asked Mrs. Graham and Aunt Patricia and me to come into her sitting-room. She explained

that she asked me rather than any one of the other Camp Fire girls, because of late we have appeared to be special friends and because accidentally I gave your play its title: 'The Red Flower'. She told me I was to come and tell you how much she liked it before she spoke to you herself, so that perhaps you would forgive me for the loss of your poems a year ago.

"Allan, why don't you say something? What is the matter? I simply go on talking in this stupid fashion because you won't speak."

"I can't, Gill, not for a moment, the wonder and surprise and happiness are too great. Now Mrs. Burton likes my play I shall be willing to consign it to the flames from whence it received its name."

"Foolish boy, do you suppose I believe you? I ought not to tell you this, because I was not given the right, although no one said I must not speak of it. Mrs. Burton wants to play 'The Red Flower' next winter, if her manager thinks the play half so fine as she thinks it. She is to telegraph him in the morning to come to the island and give her his opinion. If they agree she wants to remain here on the island in one of the small fishermen's cottages, which can be done over, and study and work for a part of the summer. There will probably be changes that must be made, so she wants you to spend a part of the time here if it is possible for you."

There was no reply, save that leaning over, Allan lifted the anchor. Then taking both oars he pulled rapidly out into the centre of the blue lagoon and onward toward the bay.

"Don't be frightened, Gill, I'll not get into a difficulty to-night. This is the greatest moment of my life and I cannot sit still and accept it calmly. I want to feel myself a part of all this, of the water and the sky and of creation itself. Don't laugh at me and don't trouble to understand, only thank you and know that I would rather you had shared this moment with me than any one else. We are friends now, Gill, for all time, whatever may seem to separate us in the future, we must both recall this hour and the beauty and peace of the Blue Lagoon!"

* * * * *

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