

The Meadow-Brook Girls in the Hills eBook

The Meadow-Brook Girls in the Hills

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Illustrations

“I’m the guide, Janus Grubb.” *Frontispiece*

“Green goggles!” cried Harriet excitedly.

Up and up wound the trail.

The Meadow-Brook Girls in the Hills

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH GREEN GOGGLES



"I hear that Janus Grubb is going to take a passel of gals on a tramp over the hills," observed the postmaster, helping himself to a cracker from the grocer's barrel.

"Gals?" questioned the storekeeper.

"Yes. There's a lot of mail here for the parties, mostly postals. Can't make much out of the postals, but some of the letters I can read through the envelopes by holding them against the window."

"Lemme have a look," urged the grocer eagerly.

"Not by a hatful. I'm an officer of the government. The secrets of the government must be guarded, I tell ye. There's six of them——"

"You don't say! Six letters?" interrupted the grocer.

"No, gals. One's name is Elting. She's what they call a chaperon. Another is Jane McCarthy—I reckon some relation of the party who wrote me a letter asking what I knew about Jan. I reckon Jan got the job on my recommendation."

"Who are these girls, and what do they think they're goin' to do up here?"

"Call themselves 'The Meadow-Brook Gals.' Funny name, eh?" grinned the postmaster, balancing a soda cracker on the tip of his forefinger, then deftly tossing it edgewise into his open mouth. "They pay Janus ten dollars a week for toting them around," he chuckled. "Read it in the McCarthy party's letter to Jan."

"What are they going to do up in the hills?"

"Climb over the rocks for their health," grinned the postmaster.

"Huh! When they coming to town?"

"On the evening mail train to-day. Hello! There's Jan now on his way to meet them. Say! Will you look at him! Jan's had his whiskers pruned. And, I swum, if he hasn't got on a new pair of boots. Git them of you?"



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The storekeeper nodded.

“How much?” demanded the postmaster.

“Four seventy-three. Knocked down from five dollars. Wish I’d known he was going to draw down ten dollars a week for this job. I’d have got four seventy-five at least for the boots.”

“Never mind, you can let Jan make it up on something else,” comforted the postmaster. “Reckon I’ll go down to the station to see the folks come in.”

“I was going to ask you to look after the store while I went down,” returned the grocer.

The postmaster decided that he wouldn’t go. The other man hurried out, while the government employe helped himself not only to another handful of crackers, but to a liberal slice of cheese as well. He stood munching his crackers and cheese and gazing out reflectively into the gathering twilight, when he suddenly started and peered more keenly. That which had attracted his attention was a stoop-shouldered man. The fellow wore a soft hat, the brim of which was slightly turned up in front, but his face was well masked by a huge pair of green automobile goggles.

“Well, I swum!” ejaculated the postmaster. “If I didn’t know the feller was in jail up at Concord, I’d say that was Big Charlie. Hm-m-m. No. This one is too stooped for Charlie. Charlie’s six foot two in his socks. I wonder who this fellow is?”

Even then the mail train was whistling, and the postmaster began bustling about preparing to receive the evening mail, always an event for him as well as for the villagers, who ordinarily flocked into the office, hoping to catch sight of a familiar handwriting or hear a name mentioned that would give them foundation for a bit of gossip.

It was while he was thus engaged that five young girls and a young woman some years their senior got down from a coach to the railway platform, where they stood gazing expectantly about them. The young women were dressed in tasteful blue serge suits, with hats of the same material, a sort of uniform, the villagers decided, and, had not the station platform been too dark, the eager spectators would have seen that the faces of the visitors were tanned almost to swarthinness.

“Shall I ask some one if Mr. Janus Grubb is here?” questioned one of the girls.

“No, wait a moment, Harriet,” answered the young woman in charge of the party, “I will ask. Surely the guide should be here to meet us, since Miss McCarthy’s father had arranged for it.”



“You are looking for a guide, Miss?” questioned a voice at her side. Miss Elting, the guardian of the party, glanced up inquiringly. She looked into a face of which she could see but little. The most marked feature of the face was a pair of huge green automobile goggles. These gave to the face, which she observed wore a peculiar pallor, a sinister effect, caused no doubt by the goggles.

“We are looking for Mr. Janus Grubb. Are you he?” she asked sharply.



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The man nodded.

“This way,” he said in a hurried voice.

“Come, girls,” urged the guardian; “I thought Mr. Grubb would not fail us.”

“And a funny looking person he is,” scoffed Jane McCarthy. Her companions, Hazel Holland, Margery Brown and Grace Thompson, giggled. Harriet Burrell plucked the sleeve of the guardian’s light coat.

“I wouldn’t go with him, Miss Elting,” she urged.

“Why not, dear?”

“I don’t like his looks. Make him take off his glasses. There is something peculiar about him.”

“This way, please!” the guide’s voice took on a tone of command. They had nearly reached the upper end of the platform when he issued his peremptory order. Just then a shout was heard to the rear of them. A man came running toward them.

“Hey, there!” he called. The girls halted. “Are you the Meadow-Brook Gals?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Miss Elting, brightly.

“Well, I’m mighty glad to know about it. ’Pears as if you didn’t know where you was going.”

“And who are you, sir?” demanded the guardian.

“I’m the guide, Janus Grubb.”

“Will you listen to the man!” chuckled Jane.

Harriet nodded with satisfaction.

“Janus Grubb? Why, sir, I don’t understand. We have already met Mr. Grubb,” cried Miss Elting.

“Somebody is crazy,” muttered Jane, “I think the man with the green goggles is the lunatic.”

“Show me the man who said he was myself,” roared the newcomer.



Miss Elting turned to point out the man who had been piloting them along the platform. She uttered a little exclamation. The man with the goggles was nowhere in sight. "Why, where did Mr. Grubb go?" she exclaimed.

"I'm Janus Grubb and I'd like to see the man who says I'm not," shouted the guide indignantly, forgetting that he was addressing a woman.

"Please come to the station agent with me. If he identifies you, I am satisfied," declared Miss Elting with dignity, looking disapprovingly at the excited man. She moved back toward the station, followed by her charges, and a moment later the railroad agent had identified Janus to her entire satisfaction.

The girls giggled. There was something funny about their having been deceived so easily, but Miss Elting did not regard matters in that light. "Can you tell me who the man with the goggles is?" she demanded, turning to the real guide after the identification had been made.

"If I knew him there'd be trouble," threatened Janus. "What kind of a looking feller was he?"

Harriet answered, giving a very excellent description of the man with the goggles.

"Don't know him," said Janus, stroking his whiskers reflectively. "Lucky for him that I don't. What do you want to do now?"

"Go to the post-office," cried the girls.

"There must be mail for us there," added Hazel. "I'm so anxious to hear from home."



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“Yeth, tho am I,” lisped little Grace Thompson.

“You have arranged for us at the hotel for to-night, haven’t you?” demanded Jane McCarthy. “Father said you would look after these matters for me.”

“It’s all right, Miss. We’ll go to the postoffice now. I’ll look after your baggage when we get you settled for the night. We won’t take it away from the station till we talk over what you want to do. Are you ready?”

They walked down the street, laughing and chatting, a happy lot of girls, followed by a group of curious villagers, who even accompanied them into the post-office. It was unusual to see so many pretty girls in Compton, for summer visitors seldom came to the place. Furthermore, these were different from any visitors ever seen there, so far as dress was concerned. While waiting for the mail to be distributed, the girls laughed and talked, apparently utterly oblivious of the presence of the staring villagers. Miss Elting inquired for mail for the party as soon as the wicket was opened.

“Here, Tommy, is a letter for you,” she smiled. Grace took the letter eagerly. “And here are letters for Harriet, Hazel, and Margery. There is one for me, too. It is from your father, Jane.”

“I have a letter here from Dad. I—will you look at that?” Jane stood staring at the window. For a brief instant she had caught sight of a man wearing a huge pair of goggles. He was peering through the post-office window at them. But as she looked, the man disappeared. “It was our friend with the green goggles again as sure as I’m alive!” she exclaimed. “He was staring in here for all he was worth, but the minute he saw me looking at him he vanished.”

“I am afraid we are going to have trouble with this mysterious individual,” declared Harriet. “He seems to have developed a peculiar interest in our affairs that is far from flattering.”

“We are not going to be annoyed as we were last year,” said Miss Elting firmly. “Mr. Grubb, there is something very strange in all this. If for any reason you know this man or have even the slightest idea of his identity I must ask you to be perfectly frank with me.”

Janus Grubb declared solemnly that he had not the least idea who the man could have been. Nor had he been able to find any person who had seen the fellow approach them. Miss Elting and the guide stepped out to the porch, followed by the girls, still chatting over the news from home contained in their letters.

“Now, where do you want to go first?” asked the guide after they had reached the porch.



“We will trust to your judgment,” answered Miss Elting. “You know best. We wish to try a little mountain climbing and we wish to see the larger of the White Mountains. We would like to see everything of interest in the White Mountain country.”

“That’s a pretty big contract,” chuckled Janus; “but I reckon we can show you what you want to see. For instance, there’s Mt. Chocorua, Moosilauke, Mt. Washington, Mt. Lafayette and as many more as you like, all the real thing and offering all the climbing you will care to do, unless you want to follow the trails that all the visitors take.”



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"No, we do not. We prefer to blaze our own trails, or, rather, to have you do so, and the rougher they prove the better, as long as it is safe. My girls are equal to any sort of rough-and-tumble climbing. How do we get to the mountains?"

"I've engaged a carry-all to take us out to the foothills. From there you can walk or ride. If we take the rough trails, of course we'll have to climb."

"I shall ask you to lay out your route, then arrange to have some of our baggage shipped on to meet us, say a week from now. Our necessary equipment we can carry. The girls are used to shouldering heavy packs. You will provide climbing equipment. I understand from Miss McCarthy that you are a climber."

"I'm everything and anything in the White Mountain Range," answered the guide boldly.

"Then, what do you say if we make Mount Chocorua first?"

"Perhaps you had better decide for us."

"This mountain is three thousand five hundred feet high. The way we shall take you will, I think, find rugged enough to please the young ladies," added Janus, with a grin behind his whiskers. "What time will you be ready to start?"

"As soon after daylight as we shall be able to get our breakfast."

"He had better bring our baggage from the station to-night. Then we can have our packs in readiness," suggested Harriet Burrell.

"Yes, please do that, Mr. Grubb."

"Anything else, Miss?"

"Not that I think of for the moment. We have our tent in sections. We also shall pack our blankets and such other things as will be needed. The rest of the equipment can be sent on ahead to meet us wherever you say. I don't know what the most convenient point would be. Where would you suggest?"

"I can send it to the Tip-Top station on Moosilauke. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll be going," said the guide. "I'll take you over to the Compton House, and if you want to see me again this evening, you can call me on the telephone."

Janus had started to move toward the steps preparatory to going about his duties, when an exclamation from Harriet Burrell caused them to turn sharply to her.



“There he is! There is the man with the goggles!” she whispered, pointing toward the store. They saw a stoop-shouldered man standing with his back against the large window. He was facing them, but, his face being in the shadow, they were unable to distinguish the features. The light in the store being at his back, and his head slightly turned to the steps, toward which Janus was moving, Harriet Burrell was enabled to look directly through one of the lenses. She saw that the glass was green and that it masked effectually the eyes of the strange man.

“Quick, Mr. Grubb!” cried the girl. “The man again! Find out who he is!”

Janus, who had moved down to the second step, now started back, and was on the porch with one bound, thrusting the Meadow-Brook Girls aside in his eagerness to reach the man who had impersonated him.



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“Where is he?” shouted Janus, in a voice that brought most of the villagers from the store on the run. “I see him!” Grubb made a leap, when, as though he had vanished into thin air, the stranger disappeared from sight.

The Meadow-Brook Girls gasped in amazement. But Harriet Burrell, quicker in thought and action than even the guide himself, leaped from the end of the porch and sped swiftly around the side of the store toward the rear yard.

CHAPTER II

MISS ELTING’S MYSTERIOUS CALLER

“Come back here!” shouted the guide. Harriet halted. She hesitated at sight of the black shadows there rather than at the command. She distinctly heard some one floundering over a high board fence that shut in the rear yard of the store and post-office. Janus’s hand was on her arm.

“Well, I swum!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, that’s too bad. He got away,” cried Harriet ruefully. “I was too slow. I could have caught him just as well as not, had I not been so stupid as to wait.”

Harriet and the guide walked to where her companions were standing, not certain what they ought to do, not quite sure what had occurred.

“This one’s all right,” chuckled Janus. “She’s got the spunk, but she needs watching. She’ll get the whole outfit in trouble. Tell me about it,” he concluded, turning to Harriet.

“You saw it, sir?” asked Harriet quickly.

“I didn’t see anything,” returned the guide. “The man was standing on the spot where you are standing at this moment. He was listening to what we were saying, but for what reason I can’t imagine. I made the mistake of calling to you. I shouldn’t have done that. When you started for him he disappeared.”

“Yes, we saw him; then we did not,” added Miss Elting.

“You didn’t stop to think. You were too excited, and, besides, I was nearer to the man than were the rest of you girls. He simply dropped down on all fours and ran off the porch like a dog or a cat.”

“Well, I swum!” muttered the guide.

“Mr. Grubb, I don’t like this,” declared the guardian severely.



“Neither do I, Miss,” he replied in a tone that made the girls laugh.

“I am not certain what I ought to do, Mr. Grubb,” continued Miss Elting. “If it means that my girls are to be annoyed and disturbed, we shall be obliged to look for another guide. You know I have a personal responsibility in this matter. I shall have to think it over. Unless you can give me reasonable assurance that these incidents will not be repeated, then I shall have to make some different arrangements. You will please send the luggage to the hotel as suggested. I will see you early in the morning, at any rate. Come, girls.”

Janus, somewhat downcast and very thoughtful, led the way to the Compton House, a short distance down the street from the post-office and grocery store. The girls began talking almost as soon as they had left the store porch.



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"Please, please don't discharge him," begged Hazel. "He is such a nice man."

"And thuch nithe whitkerth," added Grace Thompson. "He lookth jutht like an uncle of mine, who——"

"I agree with the girls, Miss Elting," interjected Harriet. "We are able to take care of ourselves. Perhaps this is simply another crazy man, of whom we shall be rid as soon as we leave the village for the mountains in the morning. Please don't dismiss Mr. Grubb."

"I shall have to think this matter over," was the guardian's grave reply. "We do not care to repeat last summer's experience. You remember what came of relying on the assurance of a stranger." Miss Elting referred to the manner in which they had been tricked by the man who had charge of her brother's houseboat the previous summer, and whose treachery had caused them so much annoyance.

None of the Meadow-Brook Girls made reply. They were as fully puzzled in this respect as was their guardian. Miss Elting, however, pondered over the mystery all the way to the hotel. They found the Compton House a very comfortable country hotel, rather more so than some others of which they had had experience during their previous journeys. Arriving at the hotel, they hurriedly prepared for supper, for they were late and the other guests of the house had eaten and left the dining room before the Meadow-Brook Girls had even entered the hotel.

By the time supper was finished, their luggage had come over from the station. Janus Grubb, went home, not a little troubled as well as mystified by the occurrences of the evening. Who the man could possibly be he had not the remotest idea. He tried to recall who of his acquaintances might be guilty of playing such a joke on him. To the mind of Janus the incident could have been only a prank, though he questioned the good taste of any such interference between himself and his customers.

On the contrary, Miss Elting and her young charges attached more serious meaning to the performances of the man who had regarded them through green goggles. They regarded the incident with suspicion and agreed to proceed only with the utmost caution.

None of the readers of this series need an introduction to Harriet Burrell and her three friends, who figured so prominently in "*The Meadow-Brook girls under canvas*." It was in this narrative that the four chums made their first expedition into the Pocono woods and for several happy weeks were members of Camp Wau-Wau, a campfire association of which the girls became loyal members. At the end of their stay in camp they decided to walk to their home town, sending their camping outfit on ahead.



The story of their journey home on foot was told in the second volume, "*The Meadow-Brook girls across country*," in which an Italian and his dancing bear, a campful of gipsies and a band of marauding tramps furnished much of the excitement. Then, too, the friendly aid and rivalries of a camp of boys known as the Tramp Club furnished many enjoyable situations.



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It was in the third volume, "*The Meadow-Brook girls afloat*," that Harriet Burrell and her friends were shown as encountering a considerable amount of adventure. The girls led an eventful life on the old houseboat on one of the New Hampshire lakes, and also encountered a mystery which, with the help of the Tramp Club, was run to earth, but the solving of it entailed the loss of the "Red Rover," their houseboat.

And now the Meadow-Brook Girls were about to spend a few weeks among the "Marvelous Crystal Hills," as the White Mountains in New Hampshire have been aptly termed.

Much time and thought had been spent in preparing properly for this long vacation jaunt. Camp equipage had all been overhauled, and much that would serve excellently where there was transport service had been discarded for this journey into the hills.

Resting for a while after finishing supper, the girls began to make up neat packs containing such bare equipment and food supplies as they believed to be indispensable. Then there were the tent, blankets and cooking utensils to be looked after. Of course, the guide would carry much of this dunnage, yet our girls were no weaklings, and no one of them expected to shirk carrying her fair share of the load.

It was after nine o'clock when Harriet and her chums finished the making-up of the packs. Soon after a clerk knocked on the door of Miss Elting's room.

"There's a man below who wishes to speak with you," the clerk informed her.

"It must be Mr. Grubb," guessed the guardian, and left her packing to go downstairs. She glanced into the lobby of the hotel; then, not seeing Janus there, stepped into the parlor. A man, a stranger, was sitting near a door that led out to the hotel veranda. In the light of the kerosene lamp that hung suspended from the ceiling she was not able to make out his features at first. She saw that he wore a heavy black beard, that he was rather roughly dressed, but that his hands were white.

"Are you the man who wished to speak with Miss Elting?" she asked, confessing to herself that she did not wholly like the appearance of the man.

"Yes," he answered, rising. Now that the light fell on his face she noted that he had a low, receding forehead. His beard covered the greater part of his face.

"About what do you wish to speak with me?"

"Well, it's rather a delicate matter, Miss," the man made reply, gazing down at the carpet, twisting his soft felt hat awkwardly. "I—I wanted to ask if you needed any assistance."

"What do you mean?"



“You are going into the mountains?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will need to have some one to show you the way and look after you and your party.”

“We already have engaged some one to do that. You mean a guide, I suppose?”

He nodded.

“May I ask your name?”



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“John Collins.”

“Do you live here?” she asked, curious to know more about the man, whom she began to distrust.

“Not now. I live over in the next village. I was in town and heard that you folks wanted a guide. I know more about the White Mountains than any other man in the State of New Hampshire. I can show you more, and take better care of your party, than anybody else you could find.”

“Do you know Janus Grubb?”

“Ye—yes,” Collins twisted uneasily, “I know him.”

“He is to be our guide. The arrangements were made some time ago by the father of one of our young women. Mr. Grubb starts with us tomorrow morning, unless there should be some change in the arrangements.”

“I’m sorry, Miss.”

“I’m sorry, too, since you have been so kind as to offer your services,” replied the guardian politely.

“I didn’t just mean it that way, Miss. I meant about Janus.”

“How so?”

“I don’t just like to say. Yes, I will, too. Do you know anything about Jan Grubb?”

“No,” admitted Miss Elting.

“Then you’d better ask. I am afraid you are putting too much confidence in him.”

“Mr. Collins, please be more explicit. What do you mean?”

“You’ll find out after you’ve got out into the hills. He doesn’t know any more about the hills than a little yellow dog that’s spent all its life in town. He’ll get you into all kinds of trouble, and then he’ll leave you to get out of it as best you can. You remember what I tell you.”

“Of course, I thank you for telling me,” answered the guardian rather stiffly. “However, we are quite satisfied with Mr. Grubb. As I understand it, he is a highly respected citizen of Compton and an efficient mountain guide. That will be quite sufficient for us.”

“I need this job. I—I need the money, Miss,” whined the stranger.



“I am satisfied with the arrangements I have already made.” Miss Elting turned to leave the room.

“My family needs it. I’ve been out of work a long time, and——”

“I am very sorry. I wish it were in my power to assist you, but I have very little voice in the matter. Another person—the one who is paying the expenses of this trip—attended to all that. You will see that it is quite useless to plead, deep as my sympathy is for you.”

The man rose and eyed her with an expression that was particularly unpleasant to behold. Miss Elting returned her strange visitor’s gaze. Something other than his looks repelled her, yet there was nothing in either manner or words to account for this feeling of repulsion on the part of the guardian.

“In case anything should occur to make it necessary for us to look further for a guide I shall remember you,” she said slowly. “I suppose I can reach you here at Compton?”

“N—n—no,” was the hesitating answer. “But if you need me, I’ll be about. Mark what I tell you, Jan Grubb is going to get you into a fine mess! You will be sorry you ever engaged him; that’s all I’ve got to say about it. Good night, lady.”



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“Good night, Mr. Collins,” replied the woman coldly. His final words, so full of rancor, had destroyed what little sympathy he had aroused in her. Miss Elting stood aside while the man stepped toward the door.

At this juncture Harriet Burrell appeared in the doorway leading to the hall. She had missed Miss Elting, and, not finding the guardian in her room, had come downstairs in search of her. Harriet had not known that the guardian was engaged.

“Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Elting. I did not know—I thought you were alone.”

“It is all right. Come in, Harriet. What did you wish?”

Harriet did not reply. Instead, she gazed perplexedly at the retreating form of Miss Elting’s late caller.

“You’ll be sorry you ever took up with that hound,” flung back the fellow, turning as he was about to step out on the veranda.

Miss Elting made no reply. Her lips tightened a little, then she turned with a half-smile, regarding Harriet’s frowning face quizzically.

“What does it mean, Miss Elting?” questioned the girl.

“I don’t know, my dear. The man wanted to act as our guide. I am glad he isn’t the one who is to lead us over the mountains. I don’t like him at all. You heard what he just said?”

Harriet nodded.

“He was referring to Mr. Grubb.”

“Oh!”

“I don’t know what to make of it. What reason do you suppose he could have for coming to me in this manner? It is all very strange.”

“I don’t know, Miss Elting. I am wondering.”

“Wondering what?”

There was something in the set of the shoulders, in the swing of them as the man walked away, in the poise of the head, that had impressed Harriet Burrell as being vaguely familiar. Something of this must have been reflected in the Meadow-Brook Girl’s face, judging from the guardian’s next question.



“Of what are you thinking, dear?”

“I have seen that man before, Miss Elting.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know. My memory connects him with something unpleasant. I wish I knew what it is, for I am positive there is something wrong with him. Wait! I know! I know of whom the man reminds me. Can’t you see it? Don’t you know?” cried Harriet eagerly.

The guardian shook her head.

CHAPTER III

THE START THAT CAME TO GRIEF

“Who do you think it is, Harriet?”

Harriet Burrell whispered something in the ear of the guardian. Again Miss Elting shook her head, this time with decision.

“Wrong, this time. There isn’t the slightest resemblance that I could observe. I thought of that, too. But let’s not bother our heads about it any further. We have things of greater importance to consider this evening, and, besides, we must go to bed soon; we are to make an early start in the morning, you know.”

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Harriet shook her brown head slowly. She was positive that she was right in her identification of the visitor, Collins. She determined to ask some questions at the first opportunity. This she did on the following morning, inquiring of the hotel clerk about the man who had so strangely called on Miss Elting. The clerk said he had never heard of the man. In the preparations that followed Harriet forgot about the caller. Grubb had a carry-all at the hotel before they had finished their breakfast. The equipment for the party occupied little room. Janus had consulted with Miss Elting about the food supplies, and these were packed in the smallest possible space, with the exception of a few packages for their use before they got into the mountains.

The drive to the point where they would leave the wagon would occupy the greater part of the day. The girls looked forward to that day's journey with keen anticipation. They started out decorously and quietly, for the inhabitants of the village were early risers and the girls did not wish to attract unpleasant attention to themselves. Once they were well out of the village, however, the Meadow-Brook Girls' spirits bubbled forth in song, shout and merry laughter. The air was crisp and cool until the sun came up, then it grew warm.

Janus, sitting up by the driver, was almost sternly silent. Miss Elting, in the light of the previous evening's interview, regarded him from time to time with inquiring eyes. She could not believe what her caller had told her of their guide. Janus was plainly an honest, well-intentioned man. Of this she had been reassured that morning in an interview with the proprietor of the Compton House.

At noon, their appetites sharpened by the bracing air and the fact that they had eaten an early breakfast, the party made a halt. The horses were unhitched and allowed to graze beside the road. The guide built a fire, Harriet and Jane in the meantime getting out something for their luncheon, which was to be a cooked one instead of a "cold bite." Hazel, Jane and Margery spread a blanket on the ground, while Tommy sat on a rail fence, offering expert advice but declining to assist in the preparations.

It was a merry meal. Even Janus was forced to smile now and then, the driver making no effort to conceal his amusement over the bright sallies of the Meadow-Brook Girls.

"Come! We must be going, unless you want to camp beside the road to-night," urged the guide. The girls had finished their luncheon and were strolling about the field.

"Why, we haven't thettled our dinner yet," complained Tommy.

"You'll have it well settled in less than an hour. The road from here on is rough," returned Janus. "You'll be wanting another meal before the sun is three hours from the hills."

"We want to pick some wild flowers," called Margery.



“Girls, don’t delay us! The driver wishes to get back home to-night and we must reach the camping place in which Mr. Grubb has planned for us to spend the night,” warned the guardian.



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“Yes, we’ve got to hike right along,” agreed Janus. “Hook up those nags and be on the way, Jim,” he added, speaking to the driver.

It was only a short time until they were on the way again. The country was becoming more sparsely settled, the hills more rugged and the forests more numerous. Here and there slabs of granite might be seen cropping up through the soil; in the distance, now and then, they were able to catch glimpses of the bare ridges of the mountains toward which they were journeying.

“Those mountains,” explained the guide, “are called ‘The Roof of New England.’ There’s not much of any timber on top, but on the sides you will find some spruce, yellow pine and hemlock. It’s all granite a little way under the subsoil; and over the subsoil grows moss. Among these mosses and the roots of the trees almost every important stream in New England takes its rise, and some of them grow to be quite decent rivers. You ladies live in this state, don’t you?”

Miss Elting nodded.

“I am afraid we never realized what a beautiful state New Hampshire is until we began looking about a little,” answered Harriet Burrell.

“There are too many thtoneth,” objected Tommy. “I thhall be afraid of thtubbing my toeth all the time.”

“Lift your feet and you won’t,” suggested Margaret, with a smile.

“Buthter, I didn’t athk for your advitthe,” retorted Tommy.

“There are the foothills,” interrupted the guide, “and there is Chocorua. Isn’t she a beauty?”

This was the girls’ first real glimpse of the White Mountains. Chocorua loomed high in the air, reminding them of pictures they had seen of ancient temples, except that this was higher than any temple they had ever seen pictured. Its gray domes, flanked by the other tops of the neighboring range, stood out clearly defined.

“Three thousand five hundred feet above sea level,” the guide informed them, waving a hand toward Chocorua. “Doesn’t look that high, does it?”

“Have we got to climb up there?” questioned Margery.

“We are going to. We do not have to if we don’t want to,” replied Hazel.

“Oh, dear, I’m too tired to go on,” whined Margery.



“I knew Buthter could never climb a mountain,” observed Tommy, with a hopeless shake of her little tow-head. “But never mind, Buthter, you can thtay here and wait until we come back. It will only be a few weekth and you won’t be tho very lonely. Of courthe, you will mith me a great deal.”

“Don’t worry yourself over me,” snapped, Buster. “I can climb as well as you. But if I did stay behind, you can make up your mind I wouldn’t miss you.”

“Stop squabbling, girls,” laughed Harriet. “Neither one of you could get along without the other.”



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The granite domes soon faded in the waning light. The driver urged on his horses. The carry-all bumped over the uneven road, swaying giddily from side to side, the girls clinging tightly to the sides of the wagon, fearing that they might be thrown out. Darkness shut out pretty much everything at an early hour. Janus decided that they had better wait for supper till they reached the "Shelter," a cabin part way up the side of the mountain, where tourists halted for a rest or to stay over night when intending to climb the mountain. It was not expected that there would be any save themselves there on this occasion.

The road grew so uneven that the driver became a little uneasy. He finally declared that he did not dare to try following the trail up to the Shelter that night; that either he would put them down at the foot of the mountain or make camp there until the following morning, when he would continue the journey up the mountain to the shelter.

Janus consulted with Miss Elting. He said they could walk to the Shelter in a couple of hours, provided the girls were hard enough to stand the climb. The guardian assured him that they were equal to anything in the walking line. It was, therefore, settled that the driver should take them to the foot of the mountain, whence they would make their way on foot to the stopping place for the night, thus beginning their tramp at the base of the mountain.

"How much farther have we to go?" questioned Harriet.

"A mile farther on we pass over a long, covered bridge. The road takes a sharp bend beyond that. The foot of the mountain lies less than a mile from the end of the bridge. We shall soon be there," answered Janus. The girls burst forth into song. Janus had to shout to make himself heard when he spoke to the driver. The horses were traveling at a lively pace. They did not enjoy the disturbance behind them, and their driver, having wrapped the reins about his arms to give him greater purchase, was pulling sturdily, his feet braced against the dashboard of the carry-all.

"Here's the bridge," cried the guide.

A lantern had been lighted and hung from the rear axle of the carry-all. But this did little more than cast weird, flickering shadows ahead. It certainly did not light up the road ahead of there. In the dense darkness the bridge was not visible to the eyes of the Meadow-Brook Girls.

"The bridge ith coming. Low bridge!" piped Tommy.

"Be quiet; I fear we are making the driver's work difficult," warned Miss Elting.

"Oh, but isn't this the fine ride?" cried Crazy Jane. "It's almost like being in my own darlin' automobile with the landscape slipping past on a greased track. Now, what if one



of the horses should fall down? Wouldn't we be tumbled into a goose pile!" chuckled Jane.

"Oh, thave me!" cried Tommy.

"Don't suggest anything so awful," begged Margery.



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“Oh! What’s that!” exclaimed Harriet.

The others did not know to what she referred, but they felt a sudden jolt as the vehicle lurched to the side of the road, then back again.

“What is it?” demanded Hazel.

“The horses have taken fright,” answered the guardian calmly. “Be careful that you do not excite them further.”

“Are—are the hortheth running away?” stammered Tommy.

“Not yet,” reassured Harriet.

“Don’t be frightened,” called back the guide encouragingly. “Jim can hold any hosses that ever chewed a bit. We’ll be on the bridge in a minute; then they can thrash all they want to. Look out!”

There followed a crash, a breaking, splintering sound as the right rear wheel of the carry-all swerved into the side of the covered bridge a few inches from the outer end. The wheel put a hole through the siding of the bridge. It was fortunate for the carry-all that the wheel had not swerved a second earlier. Had it done so, the carry-all must have been wrecked on the stout post at the outer end of the long bridge.

What had so startled the horses none of the occupants of the carry-all knew. The driver knew that they had had a narrow escape from being hurled down an embankment. It was a bad place for horses to take fright. He had managed, however, to pick the team up by the reins and set them down in the middle of the road, where they remained but a few seconds before they were swerving to one side again, then they began leaping and galloping through the long, covered bridge.

Once more a rear wheel raked the boards. The girls cried out, fearing that they would be hurled through the siding and down into the river. They were clinging to the sides of the vehicle, gripping them firmly with their hands.

“Don’t lose your presence of mind, girls,” cried Miss Elting. “I think the driver has the animals under control now.” She was obliged to shout in order to make herself heard.

The roar of the carry-all on the floor of the bridge was terrifying. As the vehicle rolled over the loose planks of the bridge floor the sound was almost as if a Gatling gun were being fired, accompanied by a crash, now and then, as the wagon was hurled against the side of the bridge.

“Oh, what a mess!” shouted Jane McCarthy. “Are we near the other end, or has the miserable old bridge turned around since we started? The horses are now going faster



than ever, and we'll be going at the same rapid gait a few moments from now, or maybe seconds——”

Crash!

The carry-all once more struck the side. Then something else occurred. There was a sudden stoppage of the horses, accompanied by the sound of breaking woodwork. It was as if the bridge were collapsing. The Meadow-Brook Girls were piled in a heap at the forward end of the vehicle, then hurled straight over the dashboard and on over the horses, amid shouts and screams. There seemed to be no end to the crashing and screaming for some moments; then a sudden silence settled over the darkened structure, broken only by the frightened neigh of a horse.



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CHAPTER IV

AN EXCITING NIGHT

"Girls!" It was Miss Elting who called. "Oh, girls, are you hurt?"

"I'm killed. Thave me!" moaned Grace.

"I think I'm alive, but I'm not sure," cried Jane. "I've scraped the skin from my nose entirely. What a mess! what a mess!"

"Wait!" The guardian's voice was commanding. "Margery, Hazel!"

"Ye—es," answered two voices in chorus. They sounded far away.

"Harriet!" There was no reply. She repeated the call, but there was still no answer. Miss Elting became alarmed now. She was still sitting in the broken carry-all, to which she had clung desperately at the sudden stoppage, thus preventing herself from being hurled out, as had occurred to her charges. Thus far not a word had been heard from the two men. Now, a groan somewhere ahead attracted the teacher's attention.

"Girls, don't move! We do not know what has occurred. Does any of you know where Mr. Grubb is?"

"Yeth. He ith right here. I jutht touched hith whithkerth," answered Tommy in a weak, plaintive little voice. "I gueth he ith dead."

The guardian clambered from the rear of the carry-all. The lantern had been extinguished by the shock. She got down, carefully groping about in the blackness for the lantern. She uttered a little exclamation of thanksgiving when her fingers came in contact with it. But the chimney had been shattered by the shock. Only the lower part of it remained, just enough to shield the flame when once this should have been restored. It was but the work of a few seconds to relight the lantern. Miss Elting ran around to the front of the vehicle. She beheld a strange scene.

Both horses were down. At first they appeared to be lying on the floor of the bridge. A closer look showed the guardian that the forelegs of each animal had gone right through the floor. Then the further discovery was made that there was little flooring at this point. The planks that had once formed the floor at this particular spot lay piled on each side of the driveway. Only the beams held the horses from falling through to the water, a few feet below.

A short distance beyond lay Janus Grubb, sprawled on his back; while close beside him, lay the form of the driver. Margery and Hazel were sitting to the right, huddled in each



other's arms. Tommy, white-faced, with her feet curled under her, sat close beside Janus, gazing down into his bewhiskered face. Jane McCarthy was leaning against one side of the bridge. Her own face had lost much of its usual color.

"Harriet!" gasped Miss Elting, "what has happened to her?"

Jane shook her head and pointed to the opening in the floor. The guardian understood. Harriet must have been hurled right through and down into the river.

"Girls! Look after the two men. Hurry!" She ran to the opening, then lying down, peered into the darkness. "Ha-r-r-r-i-et!"



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“Hoo-e-e-e-e-e!”

The guardian sprang to her feet. It was unmistakably Harriet Burrell who had answered her, but the voice of the Meadow-Brook Girl had sounded far away. Miss Elting believed that the girl had succeeded in reaching the bank of the river. Jane had thrown herself down beside the unconscious guide and was at work making heroic efforts to bring him back to consciousness. The driver already was struggling to get to his feet. Tommy hopped up, and, hurrying to him, gave such assistance as her strength would permit.

The driver staggered; after walking a few steps he leaned against the side of the bridge with both hands pressed to his forehead. Tommy regarded him wonderingly. His head was still dizzy; he had no clear conception of what had occurred.

By this time the guardian had gone to Jane’s assistance and was pressing a bottle of smelling salts to the nostrils of Janus Grubb. Janus twisted his head uneasily, as though to get away from the pungent odor of the salts.

“He will be all right in a few moments, I think. I wish we had some water,” murmured Miss Elting.

Jane ran to the wagon. She returned with a rope and a pail. Tying the rope to the pail, she lowered the latter through the opening in the floor. A few moments later she presented a pail of water to Miss Elting, which the guardian sprinkled little by little over the face of their guide. Janus gasped, struggled and rolled over. Jane turned him on his back again. This time a solid volume of water was dashed into his face. He turned over and made a feeble attempt to rise. Another volume of water smote him in the back of the neck, hurling him to the bridge floor. This time Janus got to his feet, brushing his eyes, for they were so full of water that he could not see.

“I can let him down at the end of the rope and souse him in the stream,” suggested Crazy Jane.

“No, no, no!” protested the guardian. She took Janus firmly by the arm. “Where do you feel bad?”

“I swum! I swum!” mumbled the guide. “I swum!”

“You’d have had to swim if you had gone through the hole in the floor,” retorted Crazy Jane. “Harriet went down there, and——”

“Eh? What—wha—at?” gasped the guide, blinking rapidly.

“Sit down a moment,” urged Miss Elting. “None of us is seriously hurt. How about you?” gazing at the driver. “No bones broken, I trust?”



The driver shook his head. Janus was gazing at the opening in the floor with a puzzled expression on his face. He stared at the planks banked on each side, nodding understandingly.

“Been fixing the bridge. Forgot to put the planks back in place,” he muttered.

“Isn’t it rather strange that so important a thing should have been forgotten, Mr. Grubb?” questioned the guardian significantly.

“I swum! I swum!” repeated Janus, running reflective fingers through his beard.



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"You haven't thwum yet, but if you thtep into that hole you will have the pleathure of thwimming," warned Tommy, for the guide had been edging closer and closer to the opening in the bridge floor. He drew back a step.

The driver had recovered sufficiently to note the distressing condition of his horses. Now he limped toward them. "They're goners!" he groaned.

"I don't believe it," answered Jane shortly. "They will be, if you don't do something. Why don't you get them out?"

"How can I?" moaned the poor fellow.

Jane started to speak, but a loud "Hoo-e-e-e" from the far end of the bridge caused her to pause. The call was repeated. Then they heard Harriet running toward them.

"Look out for holes in the floor!" yelled Crazy Jane. "You can't tell anything about this perforated old bridge. Come back here, Tommy Thompson!" Tommy had started to run to meet Harriet. Margery grabbed and pulled her back. Tommy jerked away angrily, but this time it was Jane McCarthy who laid a firm grip on the little girl's arm. "You stay right here." Jane lifted her voice in a prolonged call.

Harriet Burrell answered in kind. A moment later Harriet came running up to them, dripping from her unexpected plunge into the river.

"Was any one hurt? Oh, I'm so glad!" as a quick glance told her that all of her companions were there. "Oh, those poor horses!"

"Buthter thought thhe wath killed, but after I told her thhe wath all right, thhe felt better," observed Tommy, with a sidelong glance at Margery.

"Just as though I'd pay any attention to what you say," retorted Margery, her chin in the air. "You talk entirely too much."

"I'm so glad you weren't hurt, Harriet," said Hazel, "but I'm sorry you are so wet."

The water was running in little rivulets from Harriet's clothing. But her interest was centered not on herself but on the two men who were standing by the groaning horses, trying to decide what could be done to get the animals out. Miss Elting slipped an arm about Harriet's waist.

"How thankful I am that you are safe," whispered the guardian, kissing Harriet impulsively.

"The water was very cold," shivered Harriet. "I really didn't know what had happened until I went in all over."



“Were you thrown directly through the opening?” questioned the guardian.

“No. I think I fell on a horse first. I rolled off before I could get hold of anything to stop myself. Then——”

“Then you fell in,” finished Tommy.

“Yes, I did, and with unpleasant force. Fortunately, the water was deep and the current not very swift. But it was so dark that I couldn’t see which way to swim. I found the direction of the shore by swimming across the current; otherwise I might have gone up or down stream, for I could distinguish nothing. I touched bottom just a little way from where I fell in. Had I struck just a little way to the right I think I should have been killed. You girls are fortunate that you didn’t fall through the bridge. Was any of you hurt?”



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“Yeth, Jane loht thome thkin from her nothe, but she can grow thome more, and it will thoon be better again.” Tommy’s reply drew a smile from her companions, but they were all too much disturbed to feel like indulging in merriment. Besides, there were the suffering horses.

“May I make a suggestion?” asked Harriet, releasing herself from Miss Elting’s embrace.

“Somebody will have to make one pretty soon,” declared Janus, brushing a sleeve across his forehead. “What is it?”

“I should think that if you were to place the ends of planks under the horses, we might pry them up a little, so that, one by one, you could shove other planks under them. In that way we might get enough planks down to enable the horses to get a foothold.”

“Can’t be done,” answered the driver.

“There will be no harm in trying,” urged Harriet.

“It’s a good idea,” nodded Janus, after having stroked his whiskers reflectively. Janus always consulted his whiskers when in doubt, and among the graying hairs usually found that for which he sought. He was the first to go after a plank. The near horse was the one to feel the support of the plank as the guide worked it under one side of the animal. Janus turned the end of the plank over to Harriet Burrell while he ran for another plank. This was repeated, the driver, after a time, taking part in the operation, until four planks had been worked in under the horse.

“Now, all work together,” urged Harriet. “Mr. Grubb, see if you and the driver can’t get a couple of planks clear under the horse. If you can get the end of a plank on one of the beams you will have done something really worthwhile.”

Miss Elting, Jane, Hazel and Harriet each were assigned to “man” the end of a plank.

“Now, all together! Hee—o—hee!” shouted Janus. A plank slid easily underneath the stomach of the near horse and came to rest on a beam.

“Hooray!” cheered the guide. “That’s what comes of having a head on one’s shoulders. Young woman, you’ve got one. Let him down a little. Here, Jim, you get some planks around under that other horse. We’ll have them up, but we may break their legs in the final effort. I don’t know. Somebody will have to settle for the damage done here to-night.”

“The wagon is broken,” Margery informed them.

“Never mind the wagon. It’s the horses we must save,” answered Miss Elting. “We can’t leave them to suffer.”

Fifteen minutes of hard labor sufficed to raise the horses a little and to place them in greater comfort. The sharp edges of the beams no longer cut into the flesh, and their breathing was less labored. The party paused to rest from their efforts.

“If we had some rope and pulleys we could get the animals out without much difficulty,” reflected Janus. “But how to do it now I don’t know. I swum! I’m dead-beat.”

“Can you lift?” questioned Jane.



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“Tolerable.”

“Then why not pick up first one fore-foot, then another, and place them on the planks. You’ll see what the horses will do then.”

Janus scratched his head and fingered his beard.

“I swum, Jim!” he grinned, “let’s try it.”

Each man took hold of a fore-foot of each horse, and, without much difficulty, raised it to the planks before each animal. They were about to go after the other fore-foot when Tommy, who had been standing back at a safe distance, attracted their attention by uttering a little cry.

“Oh, look! it ith growing light,” she exclaimed.

“Daylight? Why, it is getting light,” cried Margery.

A faint glow was flickering at the end of the bridge, casting rays through the farther portion of the covered structure. The light was of a reddish tinge. At first, not realizing that the night was still young, the Meadow-Brook Girls welcomed that light with shouts of approval. But there was something strange about the glow that caused Miss Elting, Harriet and the men to gaze in open-mouthed wonder.

As they gazed the glow seemed to grow stronger. Then it flamed into a great glare of red.

“Fire! Fire!” yelled Jane McCarthy.

“The bridge is on fire! Run for your lives!” shouted the guide. “Never mind the horses. Run!”

With one common impulse the girls and their guardian started toward the other end of the bridge, which was not more than twenty feet from them. Margery uttered a scream of terror. Jane grabbed her by one shoulder, giving her a violent shake.

“Don’t make things any worse than they are. Tell when you begin to burn, but don’t make us think we are burning till the fire gets to us.”

“Go on, girls,” cried Harriet. “I’m going back to the other end. We must think about saving our packs and our horses.” Unheeding their warning shouts, the girl ran back toward where Janus and the driver were still engaged in trying to lift the horses. Miss Elting had followed Harriet, and the two women now implored Janus to hurry with the rescue of the animals.



“It’s no use!” he exclaimed angrily. “We can’t do it before the fire gets to us. We are likely to lose our packs, too, unless we let these horses go and attend to them.”

“Never mind the packs,” said Harriet stubbornly, as she laid a firm hand on one of the guide’s arms. “We are going to save these poor animals. Let us keep on trying, and I feel sure we can not fail. Now, think hard. What is the quickest and best thing to be done?”

CHAPTER V

ON THE BURNING BRIDGE

“We’ll have to do our own thinking,” then said Jane McCarthy, who had come upon the scene at that moment. She glared at the guide and the driver, who stood staring dumbly at Harriet.

“We must save those helpless horses,” repeated Harriet, her eyes turning anxiously toward the two patient animals.



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“But you girls must not stay here too long,” cautioned Miss Elting.

Suddenly Crazy Jane burst forth into a loud hurrah, and, running to the wagon, returned to the driver with a hand-saw. By this time Margery, Tommy and Hazel had come cautiously back to where the horses were.

“Saw the timbers out from under the horses,” advised Jane. “It may hurt them to drop into the river, but it’s better for them to drown than to be burned alive! Move quickly, now!”

“Janus,” muttered the driver, “we’re a pair of mutton-heads!”

“We are,” agreed the guide, as he ran to get the other saw.

The rasping of the saws began instantly, the Meadow-Brook Girls moving closer to observe the work, casting frequent apprehensive glances over their shoulders at the thick cloud of smoke which issued from the farther end of the bridge. The fire did not appear to be making much headway, still it did not seem to be abating. Already the framework of that end of the bridge was outlined like the figure in a set piece of fireworks. They could hear the crackling of the flames, and the wooden tunnel was becoming filled with smoke. Tommy was coughing, to remind her companions that they were in need of other quarters.

“I don’t think I would cut the ends off,” suggested Harriet. “Saw them nearly through, then cut the opposite ends. Otherwise you may leave the animals dangling in the air with no means of helping them out.”

Janus nodded approvingly at Harriet’s suggestion.

“I reckon you’re right,” he agreed. “Jim, tackle the other end. We’ll let this near horse down first and see how he makes out. If it works, we’ll drop the other fellow in the same way.”

A warning snapping sound was heard.

“Stand clear!” bellowed Janus.

The girls sprang back, and just in time. Pieces of plank shot up into the air, one striking the bridge roof with a crash. Then the near horse, with a neigh of fear, disappeared into the black water below them. They heard a loud splash. Harriet, leaning over, peered into the river.

“He’s swimming. I can hear him,” she cried joyously. “Isn’t that fine that you thought of that, Mr. Grubb?” she exclaimed, turning a flushed face to the guide.



“Huh! Thought of it? I’d never thought of it if I’d kept my thinking machine going for a hundred years. Now the other horse, Jim. We’ll have to step lively. Them flames is getting too nigh for comfort. Now you folks had better get out of here!” he commanded.

“Not yet,” smiled Harriet, “we still have work to do. We must get the things out of the wagon. If we lose them, we shall be in a fix.”

“Mercy! I hadn’t thought of that,” cried the guardian. “But shall we have time to carry them across?”

“The men will have to carry the heavier articles. I think we shall be able to manage it. Come, help me get the things out of the carry-all.”

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Harriet ran to the wagon, followed closely by Miss Elting and Margery. Tommy alone held back. Hazel and Jane also hurried forward to assist.

"All those who wish their suppers will have to work," cried Harriet Burrell.

"We need a fire company more than thupper jutht now," retorted Tommy Thompson. "If we had a fire engine we could make thith fire look thick."

Harriet was in the carry-all passing out bundles and packs. She dropped a sack of cooking utensils to the floor of the bridge with a great clatter.

"Carry them to land," she directed Tommy and Hazel.

"There goes the other horse," cried Miss Elting, as a crash and a great splash for the moment cut short their conversation. Janus uttered a yell of triumph.

"We got 'em both free!" he shouted.

"That's what," agreed Jim. "We'll pull the carry-all ashore next."

"I am afraid we won't have time. The fire is almost too near for comfort now," said Harriet. Then she darted back to the carry-all to secure a blanket that she recalled had been laid over the back of the front seat of the vehicle, and which had been forgotten when removing the other things. Reaching the wagon, she decided to take the cushions also. Then Harriet made a final search of the wagon to be sure that nothing of value had been left. The carry-all had been well stripped.

The girl sprang out, casting a quick glance overhead, when she discovered, to her dismay, that the flames were already at work, they having rapidly eaten their way along the ridge of the bridge.

"Gracious! I must get out of here and without a moment's loss of time," she cried.

"Hurry!" bellowed the voice of the guide. "We haven't time to save the carry-all. Get out from under. The bridge is going to fall."

As Harriet made a dash toward safety the burned end of the bridge fell. There was a rending noise as the weakened girders gave way under the weight of the bridge. A shower of sparks and flame shot into the air.

Miss Elting, Jane and the two men stood on shore, shouting with all their might to Harriet Burrell. But Harriet did not hear their warning shouts, nor had she need of warning. She knew only too well what was occurring. Suddenly the long bridge caved in and went down well past the middle with a tremendous crashing and snapping and



roaring, sparks and flames shooting still higher than before, the burning timbers hissing and sending up a great cloud of steam as they fell into the river.

Miss Elting, grown dizzy at thought of Harriet, had stumbled and fallen. Jane McCarthy quickly raised and dragged the guardian away.

“Harriet!” shouted Miss Elting.

The frightened girls took up the cry, but there was no answer. Harriet had gone down with the burning bridge.

CHAPTER VI



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THEIR TROUBLES MULTIPLY

Miss Elting and Jane McCarthy had climbed down the embankment, and, standing at the river's edge, scanned the water with pale faces and anxious eyes. Dark shapes drifted past them, shapes that caused them to start apprehensively as they caught sight of them.

Nearly all of the bridge that had been on fire was now in the water. The structure had broken off short, taking most of the fire with it into the river. The broken end, still in the air, glowed here and there, the glowing spots fading and dying out one by one. Of this the two women saw nothing. They were heavy with anxiety. It did not seem to them possible that Harriet Burrell could have escaped alive. Janus and Jim, who had run to the river bank, were now plunging here and there, stumbling, groping, wading or swimming about in the river to have a look at some bit of wreckage that resembled a human form. They believed that Harriet had been swept down to her death with the burning bridge.

All at once Jane raised her voice in the cry of the Meadow-Brook Girls. "Hoo-e-e-e!" she called shrilly. But no answering cry from the missing girl relieved their suspense.

"I'm afraid we can do no more," said Miss Elting with a catch in her voice. "Oh, why did I leave her? Why did I not insist on Harriet's leaving that awful place with me?"

"You couldn't help it," soothed Jane. "But you mark me, Miss Elting, Harriet is alive and sound, just like the rest of us. You leave it to Harriet Burrell to take care of herself. I tell you it's all right. Hoo-e-e-e-e!"

"Don't! Oh, don't!" begged the guardian.

"Why not? She'll hear me and she'll know which way to go when she comes up from the water," answered Crazy Jane breezily. She was putting on a brave show of cheerfulness, and somehow this cheerfulness began to take hold of Miss Elting. Her shattered hopes began to rise; she began to take courage even against her better judgment, which told her that Harriet could not possibly have escaped. Even granting that she had, they would have seen or heard from her before this.

Janus stood dripping beside them.

"Now, you ladies go back. I'll do all the looking that's necessary. Candidly, I don't think Miss Harriet escaped. She was caught when the old bridge fell down, but I'll keep on looking for her. I'll keep right on looking all the rest of the night."

Jane led Miss Elting up the bank despite the protests of the guardian that she did not wish to go, but preferred to remain where she was.



“We can do nothing here,” urged Jane, more gently now. It was all that she could do to keep from breaking down and crying, but she knew she must keep up her courage. Besides, she was still hoping, at times almost believing, that they would find Harriet Burrell awaiting them on shore.

“Didn’t you find her?” cried Hazel. They had climbed the steep bank and returned to the girls.



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Neither woman answered.

Margery burst forth into a loud wail. Tommy and Hazel stood in blank, rigid silence. They could not believe that Harriet was gone. Miss Elting sank down on a pack, while Jane stood gazing moodily off over the sluggish river.

Janus came in a few moments behind the guardian and Jane, his arms hanging limply at his sides, his chin lowered almost to his chest.

"I'm afraid it isn't any use to look further," he said. The little party scarcely heard the guide. Jim had gone on up the bank. They could hear him whistling and chirping to the missing horses to call them to him. Then they caught the sound of a whinny and a moment later another. The animals had heard and recognized their master. Jim captured and haltered them with the ropes that he had brought from the carry-all for the purpose. He then led the animals off to one side, where he secured them to trees. The driver then walked slowly along the bank to join the others of the party.

Suddenly Jane McCarthy cried out sharply, "Who's that?"

A series of little splashes had been heard out in the river; then, out of the gloom, grew the dim outlines of a moving figure.

"Who is it?" cried Miss Elting, scarcely daring to trust her voice.

"It is I. What is all the excitement about?" called a familiar voice.

"Harriet!"

A chorus of screams greeted Miss Elting's cry. Four girls and their guardian, regardless of the wetting they were receiving, rushed helter-skelter into the river, throwing themselves upon the staggering Harriet. They snatched her up, carrying her ashore despite her struggles and protests. They laid her down on the packs, each trying to do something for their companion whom they had believed to be lost.

"For goodness' sake! what is the matter?" demanded Harriet, sitting up.

"Lie still, dear," urged Miss Elting. "You will be all right in a few moments."

"All right? There is nothing the matter with me, except that I'm wet and cold." Harriet got up and shook herself, gazing anxiously at her companions. "What is it, girls? Tell me!"

"Oh, Harriet, don't you know?" breathed Hazel.



“No, I don’t. You are all here, aren’t you?” she demanded, with a quick glance about her.

“Yes, now we are,” nodded the guardian. “Don’t you understand? We thought you had gone down with the bridge.”

“Well, I did go down, but not with the bridge. What of it?”

“We thought you were dead,” continued Miss Elting, her voice shaking.

Harriet looked from one to the other of her friends. “Why, you poor dears, no wonder you looked so woe-begone. Now that it is all over, I don’t blame you for thinking so.”

“Well, I swum!” muttered Janus, combing out his whiskers with the spread fingers of his right hand.

“So did I,” laughed Harriet. “That’s why I’m here.”

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“Tell us how you escaped. Can’t you see, we are hardly able to believe that it is really you?” was Miss Elting’s excited reply.

“It’s myself, and no other, as Jane would say. After you had left me I ran back to the wagon to get the blanket and cushions we had left there. I knew the fire was near me, but I thought I had time enough to get away from it. Suddenly I felt the bridge giving way. I was close to the opening into which the horses fell when things began to happen, and I made a long, desperate dive into the river, hoping to get out from under the bridge before it fell on me. I remember seeing a great shower of sparks falling around me as I shot through the air. I wondered if it were the bridge that was falling with me. Then I struck the water. I swam under the water with the current as fast as I could, then when I thought I had gone far enough, to make it safe to rise, I did so. I don’t recall what happened after that. I must have been hit by something, or else bumped into a timber when I rose to the surface. It is a wonder I wasn’t drowned. When I came to my senses I was slowly drifting down stream, clinging to a piece of charred plank. I know it was charred because I could smell it. You know how wet, burnt wood smells? This piece of plank smelled that way.”

“Nithe, appetizing odor,” nodded Tommy. “Yeth? Go on.”

“I did not know where I was, but I knew I was drifting downstream. I kicked until I had headed the plank at right angles to the shore, and remained on the plank until my feet touched bottom; then I got up and began plodding along upstream, knowing that, sooner or later, I should find some of you folks. I heard someone call. Was it you, Jane?”

“It was myself and no other,” replied Jane

“I thought it was you. I was out of breath, so I didn’t try to make you hear me.”

“Well, I swum!” ejaculated Grubb under his breath. “I never expected to see her again.”

“What of the horses?”

“Got ’em,” answered the driver tersely, “Carry-all gone to the everlasting bow-wows. What now?”

“If the ladies want to go on, we will load the stuff onto the horses and tote them that way to the place I had already picked out for a camp.”

“How far is it?” questioned Miss Elting.

“Oh, a mile farther on, I should say.”



“I fear it would not be wise to go on just now. I think it would be better for us to make temporary camp somewhere hereabouts. We are completely exhausted. Harriet must have a change of clothing and we all need something warm to drink and eat. Do you know of a good place to make camp for a little while?”

“Back about a quarter of a mile is a grove. There’s a creek running through it. That will be a good camping place.”

“Please have the driver assist you in getting the equipment there. Don’t lose any time. Harriet, are you cold?”



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Harriet shook her head. "I'm going to help carry the stuff to our camp. Then I shall be sure of keeping warm. Come on, girls. Where are the bedding packs?"

"Down there by the tree, Miss," replied Jim.

Harriet ran to the tree. "I don't find them," she called a moment later.

Jim hurried to her. He was mystified to discover that the packs were not where he had left them.

"You didn't throw them in the river, did you, Jim?" questioned Harriet.

He declared vehemently that he had not; that he had placed them well back from the water, and that they could not possibly have rolled into the river. Jim announced that he was going down the shore to look for them, just the same. This he did, starting away at a trot. Wonderingly, and somewhat disturbed, for the bedding and the clothing packs contained articles that could not be done without, the girls instituted a search of their own, but found nothing. The loss of the packs meant their return to town to purchase more supplies. No one wished to do that, in the first place; and, in the second place, they needed warm, dry bedding and dry clothing for use that night.

While Jim was in search of the missing equipment the girls went to work and collected the scattered contents of some of the packs. Suddenly there came a long-drawn shout from down shore.

"I've got 'em!"

"I thought so," nodded Miss Elting.

Jim came back lugging a pack soon thereafter. The water was running from the pack, under whose weight the driver was staggering.

"Found them in the river," he explained. "Had drifted into a cove. So heavy I couldn't carry more than one at a time. The other packs are open and the stuff spread all over the cove. I gathered it up as well as I could. You'll have to give me a rope to tie the things up, or else bring them back in wads."

"In the river?" cried the girls in chorus.

"Well, I swum!" muttered Janus, pausing from his labors long enough to consult his whiskers. "Things are moving kind of fast."

"Oh, this is nothing, nothing at all," laughed Crazy Jane. "You will think things are moving after you have been out with the Meadow-Brook Girls for a time. Things always



do move when we are around. Look out that they don't move so fast as to sweep you with them. My! but this is a heavy pack."

The girls had taken the wet pack from Jim and were dragging it up the bluff. Janus tied this and two other packs on the back of one horse, then began making ready for doing the game with the other animal. By the time he was ready, Jim had returned with still another wet bundle of equipment.

"Our clotheth are in that pack!" wailed Tommy, as she surveyed the bedraggled outfit. "What thhall we do?"

"Keep quiet and go on up to camp," said Margery severely.

"Come, come, girls!" urged Miss Elting, a little irritated. She had not yet quite recovered from the shock of Harriet's disaster. How great a shock this had been her charges had not fully realized.

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The heaviest packs were soon loaded on the horses, after which Janus, leading one animal, went ahead to pilot them to the spot chosen for a temporary camp. Nearly half an hour was consumed in finding their way there. The night was dark and many obstacles in the shape of rocks and fallen trees and stumps were found in their path, and the guide's call that they had arrived was the most welcome information the girls had received in all that eventful day's journey.

"Here, Jim, unload these packs while I gather the wood for a fire, so that we can see what we are doing."

"Fire!" scoffed Jim. "Little fire you will see to-night, unless you have some matches. I haven't any. It was a bad job when I took this contract."

"Never mind expressing opinions. I'm responsible for making a fire, and nobody is responsible for what's happened to us on the way out here. It is just one of those unforeseen disturbances that come to the best regulated families," said Janus testily.

"I think I can find some wood for the fire," suggested Harriet. "I just stumbled over a dry stick. Here it is. Is there any birch bark here, Mr. Grubb?"

"No, but I'll fire some leaves. I've got plenty of matches," he confided to Harriet. "I didn't tell Jim. It isn't necessary for these fellows to know too much, you know."

"Just between ourselves," chuckled Harriet under her breath.

"Sure. I've got a daughter just your age, and she's almost as good a campaigner as you are, though I reckon this night's doings would have been too much for her. You don't find many such as you and your outfit." Having expressed his opinion, Janus proceeded to his work, and a moment later had a quantity of dry leaves ablaze.

"Now fetch on your wood. Who says Jan Grubb can't build a fire when there isn't anything to build with?" he boasted. "Easy. Not so much at a time. You'll press it down to the ground so the draft can't get under it, and then your nice little fire will go out. We'll build a roarer, then we can start a smaller one for cooking."

"I won't be sorry to eat a square meal," chuckled Jane.

"Nor I," agreed Margery, "I haven't eaten a square meal for ages."

"Be careful, girls. Don't stand so close to the fire. You will burn your skirts," warned Miss Elting. "You will have holes in them almost before you realize it."

Harriet had left that fire and was laying another. She called to Jane to get the supper things ready for cooking.



“Margery, you and Hazel set the table. If you can’t find a dry blanket, simply clear away a place on the ground. We shan’t be so particular about our table this evening.”

“What about it? Do we stay here all night, or are we to go on?” asked the guide.

“I think we had better make camp for the night,” decided Miss Elting.

“I reckon it would be a good idea. I’ll make a line and dry out the stuff. It’s pretty wet,” decided the guide.



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Janus drove some stakes that he had cut down. Then, stringing a rope between them, the two proceeded to hang up the wet bedding, which consisted solely of soft, gray army blankets. He took the wet clothing of the girls from the packs, hanging this on the line also, and a few moments later the blankets and the garments were steaming. So was the coffee pot. Bacon was the only other food put over for cooking. The travelers were too hungry to care to wait long for their supper.

It was not long after Harriet and Jane had begun cooking the bacon before they sounded the supper call. No one was late for supper that night, and each sat down tired and travel-stained, but there was not a word of complaint from either men or girls. They made merry over the meal, made light of their misfortunes, and altogether enjoyed themselves fully as well as if their circumstances had been different.

“What I should like to know is how those things got in the river?” demanded Janus as the meal neared a close.

For a moment no one spoke. The guide’s question was one which no member of the little party was prepared to answer. So many unpleasant events had occurred in such rapid succession that it was difficult to place the cause of this latest disaster.

CHAPTER VII

HORSES GIVE THE ALARM

“Will you tell me where you placed the first packs when you came ashore with them?” asked Harriet, turning to the driver.

“Right against the rocks.”

“And behind that large boulder?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“Oh, I saw where you threw the first pack down. It left the mark of the rope in the soft dirt,” explained the girl. “I am not gifted with second sight, but I did see that. What I started to say was that I know how the packs got in the river.”

“You know?” asked Miss Elting.

“Yes. They were thrown in.”

For a few impressive seconds no one spoke. Janus combed his whiskers with the fingers of one hand. Jim, the driver, sprang to his feet, his face crimson with anger.



“I won’t stand for that. Why should I throw the old stuff in the river?” he demanded indignantly.

“I beg your pardon. I did not accuse you of it,” said Harriet. “I know you did not. It was some other person who threw the packs into the river.”

They gazed at her in amazement.

“Harriet, what *do* you mean?” cried the guardian.

“If she had lived up here two hundred years ago or so the people would have tied her to a stake and set fire to her,” declared Janus, punctuating his declaration with a series of quick, emphatic nods.

“The driver placed the pack behind the boulder and against the rocks,” said Harriet. “Surely, he knew where he left the things. What is more, I looked while he had gone in search of them, and, as I’ve already said, saw where he had left the pack. The rest was easy to understand. The packs could not possibly have got into the river unless they had been thrown there.”



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“But who——” began Jim.

“I don’t know. That it was none of our party goes without saying. Perhaps Mr. Grubb can tell us. Who do you think it could have been, sir?” she asked, turning to the guide.

“I swum! I swum!” muttered the guide.

“It isn’t possible!” exploded Jim.

“I reckon Miss—Miss Burrell is right, Jim,” agreed the guide. “Either you threw the stuff in, or somebody else did, and we know you didn’t, so what’s the answer? The young lady has given us the answer, and there you are.”

“I’m sorry,” pondered Miss Elting. “I was in hopes this journey would be free from unpleasantness, but here we are meeting with difficulties at the very start of it. Have you any enemies who would wish to do you harm, Mr. Grubb?”

“No, no, no! Nothing like that, Miss.”

“Do you know a man named Collins?”

“Collins? Never heard of him. Who is he?”

“I don’t know. I will tell you something that you do not know, either. The night we arrived at Compton a man called on me at the hotel to ask me to discharge you and let him act as our guide instead. He said he needed the money. He also said we would be sorry for having taken you as our guide; that we would get into no end of trouble were we to go with you. He intimated a great deal more than he put into words. It was plain that he disliked you very much. He made a distinctly unfavorable impression upon me. Harriet saw him, too, just as he was taking his leave.”

“Well, I swum!” Janus was tugging nervously at his whiskers. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead. His lips moved rapidly, but he uttered no further words for some moments.

“You may go out in the woodth and thay it, if you want to,” suggested Tommy, who had been regarding the guide shrewdly.

Every one laughed. It was so plain that Janus *did* want to say things, yet restrained himself because of his position and the party he was conducting.

“Forget it!” he exploded. “I haven’t any enemies. Nobody but a crazy man would try to interfere with Janus Grubb. They know me. Why, there isn’t a man in the state who wouldn’t swear by me. If you think I’m not dependable, that——”



“No, Mr. Grubb,” hastily interposed Miss Elting. “Please do not misunderstand me. We are quite satisfied with you, but I hope you will be cautious. It is plain that you *have* an enemy, and, what is more, I am positive that I have talked with that man, and that we had better proceed with caution.”

“I’ll take care of the rascal, once I set eyes on him,” growled the guide. “What-for-looking man was he?”

Miss Elting described her caller, Harriet adding a few words with reference to the peculiar hitch of Collins’s shoulders as he walked. Janus eyed the guardian with a worried look. His fingers opened and closed nervously. He gulped, then turned to her.



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“Perhaps I’d better not go on with you. I’ll get some one else to take you through the mountains. I——”

“No, Mr. Grubb. You will go on with us,” insisted Miss Elting. “We are not afraid. We are quite used to taking care of ourselves, but I wished to impress upon you the advisability of being on your guard. If you have an enemy who intends to do you harm, naturally we shall be likely to suffer with you. For that reason I urge caution. Another thing about which I should like to speak is the burning of the bridge this evening.”

Janus braced himself. It was as if he looked for an inquiry on this subject, but had been hoping to avoid it.

“Yes?”

“I wish some one would explain how the bridge happened to catch fire,” urged the guardian.

“So do I,” he admitted, still consulting his abundant whiskers. “What do you think?”

“I think some one set it on fire,” declared Jane explosively. “I’d like to meet the villain on the broad highway, some time when I have my car!”

“Yes, it was set on fire,” agreed Hazel, nodding reflectively. “I thought so at the time. Since thinking over the matter further I am more positive of it than ever. It was an awful thing to do.”

“The person must have known that we could get away,” suggested Harriet. “I believe it was done to spite Mr. Grubb.”

“To spite me!” shouted Janus. “What do you mean?”

“I believe the planks were taken up so that you couldn’t get across the bridge with your horses and wagon. I think whoever did it wished to make you lose your horses and carry-all as well as our stuff. If it was our mysterious enemy, then he knew that we could escape. But how can you get back with your horses?”

“There’s another bridge five miles above here. I’ll go that way in the morning. I’ll ride one of the horses and lead the other one.”

Harriet rose and piled more wood on the campfire. She then began laying out the sections of their tent, which she laced together. Janus stepped over to her.

“You sit down, Miss. We will do that,” he insisted. Jim was sent out to cut some poles for the tent, Janus in the meantime smoothing off a space on the ground on which to pitch the tent. The canvas was still quite wet. Examination of the blankets showed that



these had not yet dried out sufficiently to make them fit for use. “I guess you’ll have to sit up and wait for the things to dry out,” declared the guide. He was troubled over what had happened as well as what had been said that evening. Janus, too, was still thinking of the description given him of Miss Elting’s caller. He thought he knew whom that description fitted, all except the beard. It was the beard that spoiled the picture he had in mind. He pondered over this all during the time he was working on the tent, pausing now and then to stroke his own beard.

“Don’t worry about it. We are not afraid,” said a soothing voice at his side. He glanced around to find Harriet Burrell’s brown eyes smiling up at him.



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“Eh? What?”

“I said don’t worry. We aren’t afraid.”

“Thank you, Miss. You are the right sort. Yes, we’ll take care of the gentleman, if it should prove to be some one trying to do us harm.”

“You know who it is?”

Janus shook his head.

“You think you know?”

Again the guide shook his head dubiously.

“I might, but I don’t,” he replied somewhat ambiguously. “It isn’t the party I had in mind. He isn’t around these parts now. Jim is going to see the sheriff when he gets back to Compton and have the officer look into this bridge affair. I was a deputy sheriff in the county once. The present sheriff will do anything for me. Besides, this is a matter he’s bound to look into, anyway. Here, Jim, get hold of that end-pole.” Harriet sprang to the other end and raised the pole, setting the lower end firmly on the ground, motioning to Jane to make fast the side wall on one side. Hazel also ran around to the other side, Margery to an end, then, for a few moments, the Meadow-Brook Girls gave an exhibition of their skill in pitching a tent, while Janus and Jim stood back in open-mouthed wonder.

“There!” exclaimed Harriet, flushed of face, eyes sparkling, “that is the way we make camp.”

“Well, I swum!” muttered Janus. “It beats all.”

Jane turned the blankets on the line. By this time the clothing in the packs was fairly well dried, but it looked wrinkled and old. Harriet now began digging a trench around the sides of the tent, so they should not be flooded in case of rain. Janus took the pick from her, completing the job. The Meadow-Brook Girls moved rather rapidly for the slow-going Janus. He was unused to such activity, especially in women.

Margery and Tommy were busy clearing away the supper things. Jim went out to bring the horses in nearer to camp, where he tied them up for the night. At Janus’s direction the driver also made a bed for the two men out among the trees some distance from the tent that was to be occupied by Miss Elting and her charges. The preparations for the night went on with rather more confusion than usual, the party having been more or less upset by the occurrences of the evening; beside which, they had not yet become familiar with the routine that marked the well-ordered camp.



“There isn’t a dry piece of cloth in the place,” complained Margery, after examining the line of blankets and clothing. “What are we going to do?”

“Sit up until the blankets, at least, have dried out,” answered Jane. “They are nearly dry now. See! Harriet is doing something to them. What are you trying to do, darlin’?”

“Spread out some blankets on the ground and I’ll show you,” answered Harriet laughingly. “It is an Indian trick I learned a long time ago.”



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The girl had placed some large, round stones in the fire, heating them to a point that caused them to sizzle when a drop of water came in contact with them. Poking three of these heated stones from the fire Harriet rolled them in one of the gray army blankets. She did the same with other blankets; then, passing from one to another, watched closely for the odor of burning cloth. Only one blanket had to be opened to permit the stones to cool off a little. For a full half hour these heated stones were permitted to remain in the blankets. Then, upon unrolling, the blankets were found to be dry and warm and ready for use for the night.

“Well, I swum!” observed the guide, “you’ve taught me something. Say, what do you young women need of a guide? You know more about camping than any guide in the state.”

“Oh, we have plenty to learn,” answered Harriet brightly, busying herself in placing the blankets in the tent, Jane, in the meantime, being engaged in fitting the flap to the opening. The other girls were standing about, sleepily rubbing their eyes, for it was now midnight, and they were weary both from the physical exertions of the day and night, as well as because of the many hours that had elapsed since they left their beds shortly after daylight.

“Is there anything more we can do for you?” risked Janus, with added respect.

“Nothing more, thank you,” returned Miss Elting. “You two had better turn in now. Good-night.”

Janus fixed the fire, then walked briskly away. In their tent the girls had begun undressing before this. Fortunately their kimonos had not been soaked, and after being warmed at the fire by Harriet the loose gowns felt decidedly comfortable. No time was lost in rolling in their blankets, which had been spread on the ground. For pillows inflated rubber bags were used. No one complained of the hardness of their beds, the little company was too sleepy. Silence soon settled over the camp, and the Meadow-Brook Girls slept peacefully.

Two hours had elapsed when they were awakened by a commotion somewhere outside. The shrill neighs of the horses sounded the first alarm, followed by what seemed to be a fall, a whinny, then the rapid beating of hoofs.

Harriet struggled to get out of her blanket, in which she had wound herself tightly. The tent was in darkness. She decided that the campfire had gone out. For a moment she had to think hard to recall where she was. Before she had untangled herself, the others of the party were struggling to free themselves from their blankets.

“What is it?” cried Margery in terror.



“Stay where you are! I don’t know. Something is wrong out there,” answered Harriet, hurriedly pulling on her skirt. “Dress yourselves. We don’t know what—oh, look out!”

Something struck the tent a terrific blow, followed by a series of snorts and squeals. The tent began to waver.



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"It's falling!" cried Miss Elting warningly.

"Get to the other side," shouted Harriet Burrell, herself leaping to the right-hand side of the tent in a single bound. Her companions fell, rather than sprang, aside. They were none too soon as it was, for the tent swayed, then lurched to the right, collapsing over the heads of the Meadow-Brook Girls amid the continued snorts of horses near at hand, accompanied by the sound of beating hoofs and the shouts of the two men at the other side of the camp.

CHAPTER VIII

Crazy Jane's "Find"

Tommy, having been unable to free herself from her blanket, had rolled over and over until she reached the opposite side of the tent. Margery Brown, not having got out of the way, had been hit on the head by a tent-pole, which knocked her down and so dazed her for the moment that she lay whimpering where she had fallen.

Of this Harriet and Miss Elting were unaware. Their efforts were directed toward getting out of the tent to learn what had occurred. They could hear the canvas ripping; and the noise of the floundering hordes just outside was still going on. Together the two women fought their way out from under the canvas.

"Catch 'em! Catch 'em!" Jim was yelling at the top of his voice. "The horses are getting away!"

"Yes, and they have taken a good part of the tent with them," called Harriet.

The men had halted, not knowing whether they should proceed or not.

"Come on! come on!" cried Miss Elting. She could not see the horses, but she could hear them crashing through the bushes whinnying in terror. There was something sinister in this sudden outbreak, something that neither Miss Elting nor Harriet Burrell understood. Jane, having crawled from beneath the overturned tent, came running to them.

"What a mess!" she cried in dismay. "I feel as though I had been in a railroad wreck. What was it?"

"The horses," answered Harriet.

"Is that all? Didn't anything fall on us?"

"I think we had a narrow escape from being trampled by the horses."



The guide came running to them.

“Was any one hurt? What, the tent down?”

“Yes. The animals ran into it and tore it down,” replied the guardian. “I don’t understand it at all. Do you, Mr. Grubb?”

“I swum, I don’t!” he exploded. “Run into the tent? Why should they do that?”

“They must have been terribly frightened,” averred Jane McCarthy. “Now, what could have frightened a pair of horses enough to make them so blind they couldn’t see a tent? Will you tell me that?”

The guide kicked the embers of the campfire, and piled on some light wood. At this juncture Hazel came out, leading Margery, who had both hands pressed to her head.

“Something fell on her head,” explained Hazel.



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Miss Elting took Margery to the fire and made her sit down. Margery had no need to be urged. She sat down, all in a heap, and would have toppled over had not the guardian held her up. A lump as large as a horse chestnut had risen on the stout girl's head.

"Oh, my dear! You did get a bump, didn't you?" cried the guardian. "Sit right where you are. I will bring some liniment. Fortunately, the skin is not broken. Mr. Grubb, won't you please see what you can do with the tent? I fear it is seriously damaged."

"I want to look at those halters, first, if you can wait a minute."

Miss Elting nodded, then hurried to the collapsed tent, under which she burrowed and groped about in the dark in search of her medicine kit, which she finally found and brought to the fireside. Margery's swollen head was treated until the soreness had become eased a little. Harriet and Jane supported her to a blanket that they had brought from the tent, and, after tucking her in, left the unfortunate Margery to doze and rest. Tommy crept over and kissed her on the forehead.

"I'm tho thorry, Buthter," she whispered sympathetically. "I withh it might have been me who got the bump on the head. But never mind; you will be better pretty thoon. Don't you think tho?"

Margery's answer was a moan. Tommy crept away with a troubled look in her eyes.

"The horses broke their halters," Janus was saying as Tommy joined her companions. "Can't understand what skeered them into doing that. Jim must be having a chase, or he'd have been back before this. Want to quit?"

"Certainly not," answered Miss Elting with emphasis. "But we should like to know what it means."

"Might have been a bird or something. Doesn't take much to startle a horse when he's asleep. I've known a partridge to fly up before a sleeping horse and cause the animal to break away and rip things up generally. You'll find, if you find at all, that it was something like this skeered Jim's nags."

"I gueth it wath a two-legged bird," observe Tommy wisely.

"That would be strange, indeed," answered Miss Elting. "How many legs do birds ordinarily have?"

Tommy flushed.

"That ith tho. I wath thinking a bird had four legs, jutht like a table."

Margery groaned.



“Oh! Are you feeling badly again, dear?” called Miss Elting.

“Yes.”

“What is it? Does your head pain you?” questioned the guardian.

“No, it’s Tommy. She gives me a pain.”

“Tommy, come help us put up the tent,” urged Harriet. “Maybe it will fall on your head next. That will make Margery feel well again, won’t it, dearie?”

Margery, in a weak voice, agreed that it would. Tommy retorted that she didn’t care if it did.

The tent was found to have been quite badly torn. The hoofs of the horses had left great rents in it. After examining the canvas it was decided not to try to repair it that night, but to leave it as it was until morning, when the girls would be better able to see what they were doing.



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They had once more raised the tent, having been obliged to cut one new pole, when Jim returned leading the horses. They were very nervous and kept tossing their heads, rearing and plunging at the slightest unusual sound.

“Something wrong with them. I don’t know what it is,” he said, in answer to the guide’s glance of inquiry.

“Lead ’em up here. Well, I swum!”

“Wha—at is it?” demanded Margery, sitting up.

“Look at that, will ye?”

The girls got as close to the animals as was prudent. Janus parted the hair on the hip of one horse and pointed to a small wound. The other horse bore a similar wound.

“Oh, they have hurt themselves. Isn’t it too bad?” sympathized Hazel.

“Hurt themselves!” exploded the guide. “Those wounds were made with some sharp instrument, maybe a knife. I don’t know. Now, can you blame them for running away and taking the tent down? This business is moving too fast! What are we going to do?”

“You are the guide, sir. You are the responsible head of the party,” replied Miss Elting.

“I thought I was, too. But, I swum! I don’t know which from t’other any more. Jim, what do you think about that?” pointing a finger at the horses and indicating their wounded hips. “Did they get them themselves, or did somebody do it to them? I can’t make up my mind.”

“Some one did it, Jan. The hosses never did that themselves.”

“But how could they?”

“Maybe tied a knife to a long stick. Didn’t mean to do any serious work or would have cut deeper. Just went through the skin, that’s all, but enough to set the critters crazy. See any one about these parts?” questioned the driver, turning to the girls.

“No, sir. We were under the tent. We saw nothing,” answered Harriet. “I think it must have been the squealing of the horses that awakened us. The next we knew we were being trampled on and the tent was down about our ears. Have you looked about here carefully, Mr. Grubb?”

“For what?” returned Janus quickly.

“For thpookth,” Tommy replied pertly.



“Pshaw!”

“I mean have you looked where the horses were tied,” explained Harriet. “You did examine the halters. You say they were broken, not cut. I think we should look further.”

“Yes. I agree with Harriet that we ought to make a careful search of the ground about the camp,” said Miss Elting. “We cannot afford to miss opportunities that might solve this mystery. I wish you and the driver would make a start,” she urged.

“All right. Where’s the lantern?” demanded Janus.

“It went down with the bridge,” Harriet informed him. “We have another, a smaller one, but I hardly think it will be of much use for our purpose. I’ll tell you what. Why not use some of the dry pitch pine roots that you gathered?” suggested Harriet. “They are ready to burn and will make excellent torches. We have plenty of kindling wood without them.”

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“An excellent idea,” approved the guardian.

Janus glanced at Jim and nodded. “I told you so,” chuckled the guide. “I knew she could suggest something.”

Janus gathered up some roots, whittling one end of each stick into a sunflower-like bunch of shavings. These ends he lighted, whereat the torches flared up into flickering, smoking flames. The guide led the way, followed by the entire Meadow-Brook party, Margery Brown having become so interested as to forget her troubles for the moment, though the lump on her head was still large and painful.

Just before reaching the trees where the horses had been tied, Miss Elting suggested that all save the guide and Harriet stop where they were.

“If so many of us go forward we shall not only be likely to miss any clues there are, but perhaps destroy them altogether. I have an idea that we are going to find something that will enlighten us,” she added.

“That’s good, common sense,” agreed the guide, nodding his approval.

“Is there anything you wish us to do, Mr. Grubb?” asked Miss Elting.

“Little Brownie is the pilot,” replied Janus jocularly, waving a hand in Harriet Burrell’s direction. “Whatever she suggests, we will do. We can’t do any better than to follow her lead.”

Harriet’s cheeks flushed. She had taken a torch and began slowly to circle the trees to which the horses had been tied upon arriving at the camp site. At first her circle was a wide one, Janus following her example by beginning well out beyond the trees. Harriet’s smoking torch was held close to the ground, sweeping from side to side, the torch bearer assuming a crouching position with head well lowered, body bent almost double.

“Look out!” shouted Tommy, as Harriet came abreast of her party.

“Wha—at?” Harriet straightened up sharply. “What is it!”

“You will burn your nothe, if you don’t look out.”

“Oh, Tommy!” Harriet laughed merrily. “Is that all?”

“I was thinking the same thing,” chuckled the guide. “Wish I could bend over like that. But don’t bother us, little one. This is our busy night, and right serious business it is, too.” The laughter disappeared from his face and Janus bent low to his task.



The others of the party had either seated themselves on the ground or leaned against trees. They chatted while the guide and Harriet Burrell sought for the true trail, but it was not very encouraging work.

The two torches flickered and smoked weirdly, now and then becoming mere glows like distant lamps in a fog, as the bearer slipped behind a tree or was masked by an intervening growth of bushes whose foliage was very thick and dense.

“Oh, Mr. Grubb, who of our party has brass-headed tacks in his boot heels?” called Harriet.

“I have. Why?”

“I found a heel mark that gave me that impression,” answered Harriet laughingly.



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“Well, I swum!”

“It was a guess about their being brass-headed, though,” she admitted.

“You would have made a prize sheriff, Little Brownie,” declared the guide, gazing at her admiringly. “If I’d had you to nose the trail when I was after Red Tacy and Charlie Valdes it wouldn’t have taken me a matter of two months to get them.”

“Who are they?”

“A couple of outlaws who turned things upside down in these hills some years ago. But I got them both. They are serving terms up at Concord now. Find anything?”

“No, sir.”

The circles were steadily narrowing, though the man and the girl were working slowly and deliberately, really covering the ground by inches, so thorough was their search for clues of the supposed night visitors. No spot of the size of a hand escaped the keen scrutiny of one or the other of them. They could not have answered had they been asked what particular thing they had hoped to find, but in some vague way each felt that a clue to the mystery would be turned up as a result of their search. If a person had stolen into camp under cover of the night, wounding and stampeding the horses, it was probable that footprints or other evidences of his presence had been left behind, a tell-tale clue to the recent visitor. As yet, not a single trace had been found by the searchers. They continued with their work until they finally brought up facing each other in front of the trees to which the broken ends of the halters were still tied.

Harriet glanced up into the perplexed face of the guide and laughed. Janus gave back a glum look and muttered, “I swum!”

“Have you two sleuths finished your work?” called Crazy Jane.

“It certainly looks as though we had,” replied Harriet. “What do you think, Mr. Grubb?”

“I reckon we’re beaten.”

“Yes. We haven’t found a clue of any consequence. Perhaps we have imagined too much, but I do not think so.”

“Give me a torch; it’s my turn now. Let’s see what Crazy Jane can find,” said Jane McCarthy. “My grandfather was the champion shamrock hunter of the Emerald Isle, and my Dad says I’m a pocket edition of my grandfather. Just watch me while I show you a few things.”

Harriet handed her torch to Jane, and, walking over, sat down by Miss Elting.



“Did you really fail for once, Harriet?” questioned the guardian in a teasing voice. She understood Harriet’s peculiarities, knowing that the girl was not given to talking when there was real or fancied reason why she should not.

“I should say I did; that is, I did not discover anything that I could feel certain about. But some one has been here. There was just one footprint in a bit of soft dirt, but some one had most provokingly stepped on it, nearly obliterating it. From what I could make out of the original footprint it wasn’t made by any of our party. That is all I found, but enough to verify our suspicions. Where is Jane going?”



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Jane McCarthy was moving away from camp, apparently following the trail made by the party when they came up from the river to make camp among the trees.

"That's a good idea, too," she added approvingly, instantly catching the significance of Jane's action. "I never thought of trying it."

"I don't know just what you mean, but anything not thought of by you I shouldn't consider worth bothering about." Miss Elting laughed softly, patting the brown head beside her. "There! She is returning, and empty-handed like yourself, I'll warrant."

"Do not be too certain of that. On the contrary, Jane has discovered something."

"Why do you think that?"

"I can tell by the swing of her shoulders. Miss Elting, Crazy Jane has beaten us all; you see if she hasn't. Hoo-e-e-e!"

"Jane! Oh, Jane! Did you find something?" cried Tommy, in a shrill, high-pitched voice that Margery declared might have been heard a mile away. "What did you find?"

"Did I find thomething?" mimicked Jane. "Does Crazy Jane McCarthy ever fail to get what she goes after? Yes, I did find something; something, too, that will make you girls open your eyes. And you too, Mr. Grubb! Sh-h-! Not a word," she warned dramatically. "Come over by the campfire, where we can see, and I'll show you all——"

"Thomething," finished Tommy Thompson.

"Yes, 'thomething,'" answered Jane with a nod, then hurried toward the camp. Her companions raced after her, Janus Grubb bringing up the rear in long strides, the fingers of one hand clutched in his abundant whiskers. Jim stood gazing after them, his underjaw drooping. Jim hadn't yet quite come to an understanding of this most unusual company. He stood there wondering until the girls had passed out of his sight, after which the driver, with hands thrust deep in his pockets, walked slowly campward, trying to make up his mind what had happened.

CHAPTER IX

SCALING THE HIGH CLIFFS

"Sit down, darlin's," commanded Jane, after the eager girls had reached their campfire. "Sit down and make yourselves comfortable."

"For goodness' sake, tell us!" exclaimed Margery. "Can't you see we are all just perishing with curiosity?"



“Yeth. I’m moht thuffocated from holding my breath,” declared Tommy. “But Buthter ith thuffocated hecauthe she ith tho fat. Don’t you think it ith awful to be tho fat, Mr. Januth?” She gazed, in apparent unblinking innocence, at the solemn-faced guide, who answered with twinkling eyes.

“I dunno, Miss. I never was fat. Never had time to eat enough to make me fat.”

“That ith too bad,” answered Tommy sympathetically.

“Come, come, Jane, don’t keep us in suspense. What did you find, or didn’t you find anything at all?” urged Miss Elting.



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“Don’t worry. I made a find, but you never could guess, if you lived a thousand years, what I found. I couldn’t have guessed it either. Nor could Harriet, as sharp as she is. Now, listen, darlin’s. I found—I found—oh, if you knew how funny you all look! I found an old pair of specs—spectacles. I fooled you that time, didn’t I?” she chuckled, hugging herself delightedly. “You thought it was something wonderful.”

“Oh, fudge!” said Margery disgustedly. “I might have known you weren’t in earnest.”

“I call that real mean of you, Jane,” pouted Hazel Holland.

Miss Elting laughed tolerantly, nodding at Harriet as though to say, “I told you so.” But Harriet’s gaze was fixed on Crazy Jane’s face. Harriet knew very well that there was something more to be said; that Jane really had made an important discovery, and that, after having teased her companions to her satisfaction, she would tell them the rest of the story.

“Spectacles were made to assist people in seeing. Suppose you let us see, Jane,” suggested Harriet.

“Now, now, Bright Eyes, don’t be hasty,” chided Jane. “Do you really wish to see?”

Harriet yawned as though completely indifferent.

“I am not so curious over your discovery that I cannot wait until morning to hear about it. I’m sleepy and I am going to bed, provided I can find one,” she replied, rising and stretching herself indolently. “Good night, Jane.”

“Wait!” Jane knew that Harriet meant exactly what she said. She knew that it was time to stop trifling and to explain. “If you must see them, here they are.” She drew the “specs” from a pocket in her skirt, holding them at arm’s-length suspended from a string that the wearer had fastened to them to keep the glasses over his eyes.

Harriet and Miss Elting uttered an “Oh!”

“I thought you would say something when you saw them,” chuckled Jane. Her face was flushed; her eyes sparkled triumphantly.

“Huh! Goggles!” grunted Janus.

“You have guessed it the first time,” cried Jane.

“Green goggles! Do you see that, girls?” cried Harriet excitedly.

[Illustration: “Green goggles!” cried Harriet excitedly.]



“They are, indeed,” breathed the guardian.

“Well, I swum! Where’d you find them?” questioned the guide, interested, but failing to catch the real significance of Jane McCarthy’s discovery.

“Oh-h-h-h!” chorused the Meadow-Brook Girls.

“And I believe they are the very same,” declared Harriet, nodding thoughtfully over the goggles, which she had taken from Jane’s hand. “You certainly have made a find. I think we are beginning to understand, Miss Elting.”

“Yes. Mr. Grubb does not, though.”

“Some one dropped them; I understand that well enough. But the spectacles themselves don’t tell us who the fellow is by a long shot. I know you ladies have discovered something about the ‘specs’ and I’d like pretty well to hear what it is.”



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"You are wrong in one way, Mr. Grubb. These goggles do tell us who dropped them, if our surmises are correct."

"You don't say?"

"Yes. Do you recall the little experience we had on the station platform at Compton on the evening of our arrival?"

"You mean about the fellow who tried to make you believe he was I?"

"Yes. But perhaps you have forgotten our telling you that the man wore goggles?"

"Well, I swum!" Janus stroked his whiskers nervously.

"Yeth. Tho did Harriet. And thhe got wet," observed Tommy flippantly.

"Later on that same evening," continued Miss Elting, "we saw the man again on the porch at the post-office. You remember how you and Harriet hurried down the steps after him. As he stood with his back to the window she had discovered that the goggles were green. These may or may not be the identical goggles, but I believe they are."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," interjected Harriet. "These have a white cord on them, as you can see. So did those worn by the man that night."

"I saw the fellow you mean," interposed Jim. "I wondered who he was. I was at the station to see if your party had come in. This fellow was keeping out of sight a good deal, but I plainly saw the specs on him. Then I didn't see him any more. He must have hit the trail up the mountain."

"Well, I swum!" repeated Janus.

"I think you ought to compel the authorities to do something when you get back to Compton," said the guardian. "I believe this man of the goggles is determined to wreak vengeance on us, and for some reason that we know nothing about."

"I have it!" cried Harriet excitedly. "Now I know who that man who called on you reminded me of. Collins was the man of the green goggles. Oh, why didn't I think of it before?"

"But Mr. Collins wore a beard; the other man did not," objected Miss Elting.

"I can't help it. They were one and the same. Does that help you any, Mr. Grubb?"

The guide shook his head.



“Tell them all about it when you get back, Jim. The sheriff’ll run the fellow down. I shouldn’t be surprised if the sheriff came out here. You tell him where we are going. You better get started now. No need to wait till morning. You young ladies turn in. I shall keep watch during the rest of the night. I take no more chances. It is time for something to be done, rather than to wait till it’s too late.”

“I agree with you,” answered the guardian, emphasizing her conclusion with an emphatic nod. “Now, girls, go to bed, as Mr. Grubb suggests. I shall be with you in a few moments We must get as early a start as possible.”

“Yes, the trouble begins in the morning,” agreed Janus. “But I reckon the young ladies are good for it. They are pretty well seasoned, but they will find themselves thoroughly fagged before to-morrow night.”



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It was not long afterward that the girls were sound asleep, not to be awakened until an hour after daylight. When they emerged from their torn tent they were greeted by the welcome odors of breakfast, which the guide now had ready to serve. After breakfast began the hard climb up the mountain, but the Meadow-Brook Girls approached it joyously. It was worth while because they were accomplishing something. Packs were made ready immediately after breakfast. Fairly staggering under their burdens, the party set out up a very fair pack trail, a short cut to the Shelter, part way up the side of Mount Chocorua.

The Shelter was reached about the middle of the forenoon. The girls dropped their burdens and threw themselves down, breathing hard, with flushed faces and bright eyes. Even Margery seemed to be taking a real interest in life, though she had complained a little of the bump on her head, which was even more tender than it had been the previous night after she had been hit by the tent pole.

“No time to waste. You young ladies get the luncheon ready while I am fixing the packs,” called the guide. “We must reach the Sokoki Leap before night, or we shan’t have a good place to sleep. I am going to leave a good part of the equipment here. We will pick it up on our way down to-morrow afternoon.”

The girls dragged themselves to their feet and began preparing the light luncheon that they had decided upon. It would not be wise to eat a heavy meal now, with the work of the afternoon before them. In the meantime Mr. Grubb assorted their belongings into neat packs. They were bacon, rice and flour, coffee and a little corn meal, together with seasonings and butter, with a small bag of sugar and a can of condensed milk. One tin plate apiece and “one to grow on,” a spoon, a knife and a fork for each member of the party, one frying-pan, a coffee pot and a tin cup apiece, made up the bulk of their equipment. In addition to this a belt-hatchet was worn by each member of the party, the guide carrying long, slender but strong ropes that would be needed if difficult climbs were attempted. Janus ceased his labors long enough to drink a cup of coffee and eat some biscuit. He told the girls to leave out enough bacon for the entire party for two meals, figuring for three thin slices apiece to the meal. Margery demurred at being limited to three thin slices of bacon. She declared she should perish of hunger.

After luncheon the girls repaired to the hut to make ready for their climb.

“Now, girls,” began Miss Elting, “before starting I wish to caution you that you must obey the guide. He understands mountain-climbing. I have done a little climbing but not enough to qualify as an expert. And, remember, no pranks while we are climbing; a single slip might result seriously for all of us. Which way do we go, Mr. Grubb?”

“Around back of the Shelter. There is an easy trail leading up to the top, but that isn’t the way you want to go. You want to climb. You shall. Have you your belts on?” He glanced over the girls critically. “All right,” he added, “follow me.”



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Janus led the way around a rear corner of the Shelter, after having labeled and stowed their packs in the hut. He said they would be perfectly safe there, that no one would disturb them. But the girls were rather amazed when, instead of beginning to climb up, the guide started down a sharp incline, calling to his charges to follow.

"Thith ithn't up," cried Tommy.

"We have to go through this gully first of all, then we begin going up," he explained.

The couloir proved to be something of a hard proposition right at the beginning. Jagged rocks, sudden narrow miniature gullies, bushes with sharp thorns, slippery, treacherous shale, made the descent a trying one. Once Margery lost her footing on one of these shale shelves. She fell flat on her back and slid screaming a full twenty yards, shooting out on a grassy slope little the worse for her slide, except that she had been badly frightened.

Tommy was delighted.

"Wouldn't Buthter make a fine toboggan?" she laughed.

Reaching the bottom of the gully, a long, narrow crevasse in the mountain, they began the real ascent. Up and up they went, now and then lying against a rock, to which they clung, out of breath from their exertions, their faces flushed and warm. Far above them Janus pointed out a little projection of rock that seemed no larger than a human hand.

"That," said the guide, "is where we camp to-night,"

"Thave me!" wailed Tommy.

"Keep going. We *must* reach the Sokoki Leap before dark," urged Janus. And far up there on the mountainside the Meadow-Brook Girls fixed their gaze on the bit of rock that was to be their sleeping place, and where they were to spend a night more full of interest than they dreamed.

CHAPTER X

A SLIPPERY CLIMB

For a few moments after the guide's ultimatum they plodded patiently along. No one noticed that the sky was cloudy until a shower of cold raindrops smote them in the face. Tommy and Margery cried out in alarm.

"Climb!" shouted the guide. "You've got to keep going. It isn't going to rain much. Just that one little cloud overhead."



But the cloud, though small, held a deluge of water which was poured directly down into the faces and over the heads of the Meadow-Brook Girls, drenching them. Furthermore, the water made the rocks so slippery that it became difficult for one to take a safe hold with either hands or feet. Progress became more slow, the ascent more difficult.



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Janus proved himself a master in the art of climbing. The girls met with only one really dangerous situation during that afternoon's climb. That was when they came to a place where there were steep slabs of granite with no hand-holds. Over them the girls were obliged to pass with scarcely a foothold, what there were of these being almost too far apart for them to reach. The life line here came into use for the first time. The guide crawled over the rocks, taking one end of the line with him; then the girls, one by one, crept after him, clinging to the line, every step being made with extreme caution, for a slip would have meant a drop of about thirty feet and a landing on sharp, jagged rocks. It would not have been a long fall, but the landing was another matter.

Then, at the end, there was another difficulty. Here they had to work their way around a corner. Only one could move at a time, the others holding on tightly until she had reached a place where she, in turn, could brace herself while the next one moved up; and so on until all had passed the bulging rock that had seemed to bar their passage absolutely.

"Fine!" approved the guide. "You did it like veteran climbers."

"Where is the camp?" wailed Tommy. "I can't go another step. I'm finished."

"Rest a few moments," directed the guide.

"The shower is ended," announced Miss Elting.

"Let it rain some more," declared Jane McCarthy sturdily. "We can't get any wetter and the rain will help to cool us off. It doesn't seem to be far to the camping place."

"It isn't far in a straight line. We have to take a zig-zag course, you see," said the guide.

Janus waved his hand as a signal for them to start. Once more they took up the weary climb, crawling from rock to rock, slowly getting higher and higher, but at no time in danger of a long fall. The experience of a really perilous climb lay ahead of them for another day.

Twilight was just settling over the upper reaches of the mountain when they halted for the final climb to their night's camping place. In the ravines darkness already had fallen.

"You will all wait here while I crawl around and get to the shelf. I think some of you may have to be hauled up," decided the guide. The girls gazed up a sharply sloping slab of granite, fully twenty feet long. It followed a diagonal course, the top of it being some rods from the shelf where they were to make camp. But, reaching the top, they would be able to crawl along until they made the shelf, the only level spot between themselves and the very top of Mount Chocorua.



Janus disappeared from view to the left, appearing twenty minutes later at the top of the long, smooth slab. He held a coil of rope in his hands.

“Look out below,” he called, sending the coil shooting down the slab of granite. “By taking hold of the rope, and bracing the body at the proper angle, you mountain climbers ought to be able to walk right up. Who is coming first?”



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“Let Mith Elting go, tho we can laugh at her,” suggested Tommy teasingly. “Thhe won’t care if we laugh.”

“Do!” giggled Margery.

“I shall be delighted if doing so will furnish you any amusement,” answered the guardian calmly; “that is, provided you send Margery next, then Grace, and so on.”

Harriet promised to see that the order was followed out as suggested. Miss Elting glanced up the sloping rock, took the line firmly in her hand, then waved a good-bye to the girls. She stepped cautiously to the rock, braced first one foot then the other, and leaned back until her weight was directed in the right way. She then began walking up the rock, hand over hand, with an ease that amazed the Meadow-Brook Girls. Janus reached over and took firm hold of the guardian’s arm for the last step to insure her safety.

“I haven’t heard any one laugh down there, girls,” called the guardian, presenting a smiling face to them. “You next, Margery. I hope you can climb up as easily.”

“Why, I didn’t think it would be so easy. Of course I can do it. Tommy, you watch me carefully so you’ll know how to walk up. It will be your turn next.”

“Yeth,” observed Tommy, winking solemnly as she caught Crazy Jane’s laughing eyes fixed upon her.

Margery took hold of the rope, meanwhile gazing up the slippery slope. Her courage failed her for the moment; then, as the memory of the guardian’s easy ascent came to her, she nodded confidently and began the upward climb.

“Lean well back,” called Harriet.

“Hold fatht, girth,” cried Tommy. “If Buthter fallth there will be an earthquake. I thouldn’t be thurprithed if the whole mountain fell in.”

“Keep still, you make me nervous,” rebuked Margery irritably. “Isn’t it hard enough to climb this skating rink without being bothered by you?”

In her irritation Margery forgot to lean back. She began to lean forward to assist herself, believing perhaps she could make more rapid headway in the latter position, at the same time finding fault with the girls for making fun of her.

“Lean back!” came the warning shout from above and below. But the warning was not heeded in time. Margery Brown’s feet slipped. She threw out her hands, though not soon enough to prevent striking her nose against the hard rock with such force that it seemed to the girls that it must have been driven into her face.



“Lean back, Buthter!” shouted Tommy, this time in all seriousness.

Instead of leaning back, Buster slipped back, landing at the foot of the incline a sobbing, screaming heap. Harriet and Jane sprang forward, gathering up the unfortunate girl in their arms. Margery’s face was covered with blood. The blood was still streaming from her injured nose.

“Oh, get some water,” cried Hazel.

“There is none to be had here,” answered Harriet. “Does your nose hurt you much, Margery?”



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“Oh, ye—ye—yes,” sobbed the girl. “My nose is broken. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

“Wait!” Harriet tied the end of the rope to the back of Buster’s belt. “We will let them pull you up. I think Mr. Grubb will know where to find water up there.”

“I don’t want to go up,” protested Margery.

Jane was now mopping the blood from Margery’s swollen face.

“Isn’t it too bad that Buster is so awkward,” said Tommy in a sympathetic tone. “I don’t think they will ever reach the top of the mountain.”

“Take her away! Take her away!” screamed Margery.

“Yes. Be off with you,” ordered Jane. “You have about as much sympathy as these rocks.”

“Is Margery seriously hurt?” called the guardian.

“Yeah. They skinned her nose,” Tommy informed her. “I guess they will be all right, after they have grown their new skin.”

“Pull up, please,” called Harriet. “Margery, lean forward this time and keep your hands at your sides. That is the way. Mr. Grubb will have you up there in no time. Tommy, I am ashamed of you for making fun of Margery when you knew she was suffering.”

“I wasn’t. I’m sorry that Buster suffered. I know what it is to suffer. Lots of painful things have happened to me.”

“Indeed they have, and we’ve all heard about them, too,” said Jane sarcastically.

“See how nicely Margery is going up. That is the way we shall send you up, Jane dear,” said Harriet, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

“You will not!” retorted Crazy Jane indignantly. “I’ll stay down first, and you know I will. But you’re only joking and you know it.”

“Has Buster broken her nose?” questioned Tommy.

“I think not,” replied Miss Elting. “Come, get started, Tommy. Mr. Grubb will assist you. I shall have to look after Margery’s bruised face.”

“I don’t need any assistance. I guess I know how to get up there by myself. Besides, I don’t want to skin my nose.”



“Wait!” commanded Jane threateningly.

“No, I’m going. Look out! I’m coming. Get Buthter out of the way, pleathe.”

“She doesn’t know whether she is going or coming,” was Margery’s withering comment.

“Oh, thith ith eathy,” declared Tommy. “All you have to do ith to take hold of the rope with both handth, lean back ath if you were looking at a bird flying over your head and —Thave me! oh, thave me!”

Had not Tommy quickly raised her head she might have sustained a fractured skull. Her feet left the rock and beat a positive tattoo in the air. A moment more and she had managed to entangle them in the rope and, powerless to help herself, shrieked and struggled frantically.

“Thave me, thave me! I can’t move!” she screamed.

“You can use your voice, so don’t worry,” jeered Margery, who had forgotten her own misfortune sufficiently to laugh heartily at Tommy’s predicament—in fact, they were all laughing. It was not often that anyone got the better of Tommy, and now that she had come to grief, the entire party, not excepting Miss Elting, could not resist teasing her a little.



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"Thave me!" Tommy's screams had now become despairing wails.

"Just make believe you're watching a bird fly through the air," was Jane's sarcastic advice. "Lean back and take it easy."

"We will save you, Tommy. Pull her up, Mr. Grubb," urged Harriet, her sympathy overcoming her laughter.

"What, that way?" inquired Janus doubtfully.

"Yes, certainly."

Janus grinned, then began hauling in on the rope with both hands. He did it rapidly. Tommy began to move up the slope, her feet still entangled with the rope. Janus pulled stolidly, paying no attention to the torrent of expostulations that Tommy shrieked at him. Her companions were shouting, cheering and offering aggravating suggestions to the little girl, Margery Brown's voice being heard above the rest. It was the happiest moment she had known since the Meadow-Brook Girls had started out to spend their vacations in the open. Janus was grinning almost from ear to ear. Tommy lay on her back, gazing scowlingly up into the grinning face of the guide. Suddenly her expression changed. A look of cunning appeared in her eyes. Then Tommy Thompson turned the tables on her tantalizers in a way that set the party in a greater uproar. Janus Grubb, too, learned a lesson that he did not soon forget.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAGEDY OF CHOCORUA

"Pull harder!" screamed Tommy. "I'm getting a ruth of blood to my head. Pull fatht, Mr. Januth."

This sally was greeted with another shout from the girls. Tommy, having turned her head to one side to glance up the slope, had discovered something. That something was a little nub or projection that protruded from the rock directly in her path. Unless they changed her course she would be scraped over the projection, which the girl well knew would cause her some pain as well as tear her skirt. But it was not of this latter that she was thinking when she called to the guide to hurry. The little, lisping girl had evolved a plan; but, that they might not suspect her of any trickery, she screamed the louder.

In her quick survey of the situation above her she also discovered that the upper end of the rope was tied to a rock, so that the rope could not get away.

"Fathter, fathter!" urged Tommy.



“The little one is planning mischief,” declared Jane, gazing narrowly up the slope.

“Yes, I know. Get to one side,” replied Harriet laughingly.

“What is it, honey?” whispered Jane.

“Wait! You’ll see some fun in a moment. You may trust Tommy to get even every time. There he comes!”

Janus, under Tommy’s urging, had leaned well forward. He was grinning even more broadly than before, pulling on the line with all his might, the perspiration dripping from his forehead. All at once Tommy swung in the foot that was free and thrust it straight up the slope. The little projection caught her foot. Tommy stiffened one leg and stopped short with a jolt which shook her slender body. But she didn’t care.



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“Thave me!” howled the little, lisping girl.

Janus, caught off his balance, did exactly what Harriet Burrell had foreseen he would do. The guide was jerked from his feet, and, throwing out both hands before him to protect himself, went shooting down the incline headfirst.

“Grab the rope!” he shouted, as he pitched over.

In the meantime something was happening to Grace Thompson. No one having grabbed the line, she, too, shot backward head first.

Harriet, fearing that the girl’s head would be crushed when she reached the bottom of the slope, sprang forward, and, bracing herself, stooped over with her hands close to the ground. It all happened in a few seconds. Jane had barely time to collect her thoughts when Tommy was caught in Harriet’s net. Harriet had caught her by the shoulders and stopped the force of the slide, but in doing so she herself toppled over backward.

Jane uttered a war whoop. Her joyous shout died a sudden death when the oncoming Janus collided with her, bowling Crazy Jane over. She quickly rolled out of the way while the guide continued on over the edge, tumbling down a second incline to the surface of a flat rock about eight feet below.

Tommy got up, gazing about her in mild amazement.

“Did thomebody fall down, Harriet?” she asked.

“No, somebody fell up,” jeered Jane.

“Look after Mr. Grubb,” cried the guardian; “I fear he is hurt.”

Janus pulled himself slowly to a sitting position, and took an inventory to make sure that he was all there and still fastened together. For the moment he was not quite clear as to what really had occurred. When he saw the blue eyes of Tommy Thompson peering over at him, he remembered.

“Oh, that ith too bad, Mr. Januth,” she said with a voice full of sympathy. “You thouldn’t have let go. I might have broken my prethiouth neck.”

“Let go?” roared the guide. “Consarn it, I didn’t let go! The rope pulled me over.”

“Ithn’t that too bad? Did you hurt yourself?”

“No.”



Jane was sitting on the rocks, rocking her body back and forth, laughing, trying to keep her voice within reasonable limits.

“Are you all right, Tommy?” called Miss Elting anxiously.

“No, I’m all pulled to pietheth. Tho ith Januth, I’m afraid.”

“Oh, girls, what am I going to do with you? Please hurry. It is getting dark, and we must reach the shelf,” implored Miss Elting.

The guide scrambled to his feet and began clambering up to Miss Elting and Margery. This time Tommy was directed to sit down, as had Margery. She did so, chuckling to herself, and was quickly hauled to the top. Hazel followed, sitting. Harriet and Jane ran up with the support of the rope, and in a few moments the entire party was together.

“You must follow me in single file,” directed the guide. “It’s a narrow trail to the shelf, so no nonsense. Here, pass the rope along and keep a tight hold on it, every one of you.”



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They did as directed. None had any desire to play pranks, now that they could barely see where they were placing their feet. The guide led them safely to the shelf rock, a huge slab of granite as level as a house floor, about thirty feet long and ten feet deep. At the back towered a solid sheet of granite for a hundred feet or more, while in front the rocks dropped sheer for almost twice that distance.

The girls shivered a little as they peered over the edge of the slab. The guide unslung a bundle of sticks that he had gathered somewhere in the vicinity and threw them down.

"Unload and get ready for grub," he directed. "Here's enough wood for the supper fire; I'll get some more later on; I know where to look for it. Better keep away from the edge. There won't be any coming back, if one of you falls over there."

"Yes, girls. Keep well back. We have had quite enough excitement for one afternoon's climbing. How do you feel?" inquired Miss Elting.

"Well, Buttter hath a thore nothe," answered Tommy, speaking for her companion in distress. "I have thkinned thoulderth and theveral bruitheth. I don't know how Jane and Harriet feel."

"I feel as if I'd been run over by my own motor car," decided Jane McCarthy.

"My arms and my feet are tired," admitted Harriet. "And, now that we have discussed our miseries, let's think about supper. We shall all feel better after a good meal and a rest. Here Margery." Harriet spread a blanket, which Buster welcomed by promptly crawling over to it and lying down. "The rock is awfully hard," she complained.

"Never mind, dearie; we'll pour some water on it and soften it for you," comforted Jane McCarthy.

"Speaking of water, that reminds me: Where are we to get our water for the coffee?" questioned Harriet.

"There's a spring on the other side of these rocks. There isn't much water in it, but I reckon there will be enough for us. Never mind. Don't you get it. Don't you go puttering around where you can't see," Janus warned.

A little blaze sprang up from the pile of sticks he had heaped and fired with a match. The light from the fire soon threw the outer world into black darkness. They could not make it seem possible that there, almost within reach of their hands, was a precipice dropping down nearly two hundred feet. But the thought caused them to keep well to the rear of the shelf.

The guide gathered the cups, and, with these and the coffee pot, went to the spring, a mere trickle in the rocks, where he first filled the coffee pot, then the cups, carrying them



back and placing them in a row against the wall. Harriet put the water over the fire to boil. Miss Elting sliced the bacon, while Jane prepared some rice for boiling. The latter occupied considerable time in cooking and was not particularly palatable. Janus said that in the morning they would cook enough of it to last for a day or two.



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Hazel put the bacon in the frying pan. Each one, except Margery, found something to do and found joy in the doing despite their aches and pains, from which not a member of the Meadow-Brook party was free that evening. The climbing had brought into activity little used muscles, as the girls had by this time discovered.

The supper was late that evening. Janus had brought the small lantern. This he secured above their heads by thrusting a stick into a crevice and suspending the lantern from it, thus shedding a little light besides that given off by the campfire. The party sat down with their feet curled under them and thoroughly enjoyed the somewhat slender meal.

"How good everything does taste!" remarked Margery.

Jane averred that Margery's accident had done her good.

"I've been thinking about the accident to our guide," said Miss Elting. "I don't know yet how it occurred."

"I caught my foot on a nub," Tommy informed her. "That pulled Mr. Januth down on hith fathe."

"Oh! I see."

Mr. Grubb regarded Tommy suspiciously. Her face wore an innocent expression, but when Tommy winked solemnly at Harriet, Janus was enlightened.

"Well, I swum! I swum!" he repeated, "I believe you did that on purpose."

"Why, Mr. Januth!" protested Tommy.

"Do ye deny it?"

"No, Mr. Januth, I don't deny it. Athk me and I'll tell you the truth."

"All right, I ask ye. Did ye pull me down?"

"No, thir. You fell down, didn't you? But I let my foot catthh on a nub. I knew it would pull you over. You made fatheth at me tho I helped you to fall down. Oh, it wath funny!" Tommy laughed merrily.

"Grace Thompson! I am amazed!" exclaimed Miss Elting.

"Tho wath Mr. Januth. But I'm thorry, now. I won't do it again, if you won't make fatheth at me."



“Well, I swum! Shake, little pardner! You got the best of Janus Grubb that time, but his time will come.”

“You’ve got to promithe,” insisted Tommy.

“All right. I promise.”

“Tho do I.”

Peace had been declared, greatly to the relief of the rest of the party, who did not know to what lengths Tommy Thompson might go to pay the score she thought she had against the guide who had grinned at her on seeing her in an unpleasant predicament that afternoon.

The meal finished, Janus went away to secure fresh fuel for the fire, the girls in the meantime setting the camp to rights, which meant spreading the blankets for the night and clearing away the dishes.

“There is one advantage about this kind of living,” observed Hazel; “we do not have any glassware to polish.”

“Nor silver,” added Margery.

Janus returned with an armful of wood. The fire was built up, flaring into the air just as Tommy uttered a scream. The scream was followed by a distant clatter.



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The girls jumped. For a second they thought Grace had fallen over, but great was their relief to see her standing a few feet from the edge of the precipice trying to peer over.

“What is it, dear?” called the guardian.

“Oh, I loht the frying pan,” wailed Tommy.

“What!” shouted the girls.

“I loht it. I did. I wath emptying it when it fell down. But never mind, Mr. Januth will go down for it.”

The girls groaned.

“Now you have done it,” exclaimed Jane. “Whatever are we going to do without a frying-pan?”

“I told you Mr. Januth ith going down after it,” insisted Tommy.

“No, Janus is not,” answered the guide. “There isn’t enough of that frying-pan left to make grit for chickens. Two hundred feet and then the rocks. Well, I swum! You’ll go without eating to-morrow, so far as the frying-pan is concerned.”

“We ought to do something to Tommy for that,” declared Harriet. “What shall it be, girls?”

“Oh, let her alone. Tommy will punish herself if you give her time,” averred Margery.

Tommy nodded. “Yeth, leave it to me,” she urged. “I can take care of mythelf. Buthter ith right, for once in her life. Leave it to me.”

They agreed to do so. Harriet turned to Miss Elting.

“You promised to tell us the legend that belongs to this shelf of rock on which we are encamped. If not too long a story, will you relate it now?”

The girls crept to the fire, about which they sat in a circle with their feet tucked under them in true council-fire style.

“You probably have read,” began Miss Elting, “that the Sokokis, a powerful Indian tribe, once held possession of these hills. Chocorua, for whom this mountain is named, was chief of a mighty tribe. The chief, in revenge for the loss of his son, who had been slain by the whites in battle, killed a white settler’s wife and child. This white man swore to have the life of the powerful Chocorua. Shouldering his gun, he followed the mountain trails for many days and nights. The chief knew that an avenger was on his trail; his



braves knew it. They made every effort to catch the avenging white man, but he was too clever for them. Yet not an Indian was molested. The white man wanted only Chocorua, and Chocorua knew it. The chief fled from place to place, ever pursued by the persistent avenger. Then, at last, the white man found the trail when it was hot. He followed the trail, and one day, when the morning was young, came face to face with the savage chief.”

“Do you know where they met, young ladies?” interrupted Janus, who was familiar with the legend.

The girls shook their heads.

“Right here where we are sitting now.”

“Grathiouth!” muttered Tommy, glancing about her apprehensively.



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"They aren't here now, my dear Tommy," observed Miss Elting smilingly. "The white man pointed his gun at the Indian," she continued, "but the old chieftain never flinched. He sent back a look so full of hatred that the white man almost feared him. The chief, with upraised hands, called down the curses of the Great Spirit on the head of the white man and all his kind. Then Chocorua turned and sped swiftly to the far end of the shelf, near where we got the water for our supper, and, without an instant's hesitation, leaped far out into space."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girls shudderingly.

"The body of the chief dashed from rock to rock, finally dropping into the lake which you saw as we came up. Then a strange thing occurred. The white settlers finally conquered the Indians; then they brought in their stock and began to graze them. But after that every animal that drank from the lake died. It came to be known as the 'Lake of the Poisoned Waters.' The Indians declared this to be the revenge of the Great Spirit."

"How strange!" pondered Harriet.

"A number of scientific men, passing through this section years afterward, unraveled the mystery. They say that the lime formation of the rocks, through which the water seeps into the lake, has poisoned the water. But you cannot make an Indian believe that."

"Ith thith a fairy thtory, or a really-truly thtory?" demanded Tommy.

"It is only a legend, Tommy," was Miss Elting's smiling reply.

"It has been a most interesting story," nodded Harriet. "I love Indian folklore."

"Girls, it is time for you to turn in," reminded Miss Elting.

"I don't like such stories before going to bed," objected Margery. "I know I shall have the nightmare. Oh!"

"We will roll you over if you do," answered Jane. "There's nobody but ourselves to hear you, either, so you may yell all you please, and——"

"No!" protested Tommy. "If Buthter yellth I'll yell, too, and wake up all the retht of you."

"Then you'll be attended to then and there," Jane warned her.

"You let me alone. I will let you know when I get ready for your thervithes. You needn't go on talking about me, either. You make me nervouth, ath Buthter sayth."



Janus began his preparations for the night. These consisted principally in taking each girl's rope and securing it to his own belt, which he had taken off for the purpose of making the ropes fast to it. They watched him with keen interest.

"Just a precaution," he explained. "If any one of you moves in the night I shall know it."

"My grathiouth!" shuddered Tommy, "ithn't it exthiting?" She made a ridiculous face at the guide's broad back.

The girls tried hard not to laugh, but Margery giggled audibly, bringing a frown from the guardian. Tommy, however, declared that she would not roll up in her blanket, that she would fold it over her, so she could get up without disturbing the camp.



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“Roll up when you are ready,” directed the guide.

Each girl, except Tommy, lay down on her blanket, and, tucking in one edge, proceeded to roll herself up in it Indian-fashion, leaving only her head and face exposed to the air. Tommy sat up, observing them solemnly.

“You look like a lot of mummieth,” she declared.

“And we feel like them, darlin’,” answered Jane.

The guide now proceeded to wrap the free end of rope about each girl’s waist over the blanket, except in Tommy’s case. She preferred to have the rope about her waist before rolling up in her blanket, determining in her own mind to slip the loop off after the others had gone to sleep. Fortunately, however, Tommy Thompson’s eyes grew heavy and she dropped to sleep ahead of her companions. The guide lay down with his blanket half folded over him without a single worry on his mind, knowing that his charges could not get far away without a pulling on the lines that would awaken him.

But when the pulling on the lines did come, Janus Grubb was not prepared for it, and the camp of the Meadow-Brook Girls was thrown into wild excitement by what followed.

CHAPTER XII

TOMMY FALLS OUT OF BED

The night was far spent, and the air at their altitude was crisp and chill. Below them a fog had settled over the canyons and gullies, blotting the landscape entirely from the sight of any one above the mist line. But, though there was no moon, objects could be made out with reasonable distinctness on Sokoki Leap, where the girls, their guardian and the guide were sleeping more or less soundly. Toward morning, however, Tommy awoke with a start. She twitched and jerked, rolled herself into a ball, straightened out again and twisted and turned, wide awake and nervous. Her rope being long, the guide was not disturbed—at least, not then.

An owl hooted high in a ledge above their camping place. It hooted three times. Tommy rose, throwing off her blanket. She stood shivering in her kimono, for the air had grown chilly, undecided whether to awaken the camp or lie down again. Finally she sank down and rolled over and over in her blanket, this time determined to wrap up so snugly that the cold could not reach her.

Then came the interruption, starting with a scream so terrifying as to awaken every member of the party and to frighten the owl into sudden silence. Shouts were heard from all sides. The girls began struggling to free themselves from their blankets. To do this some of them rolled toward the guide, others from him, according to the way they



had rolled themselves in their blankets before going to sleep. Harriet was the first to free herself from the folds of the gray blanket that enveloped her. She leaped to her feet, crying out, "What is the matter now?"

A strange sight met her gaze. Janus was sliding over the shelf, half rolling, half slipping, in a mysterious fashion. At the same time the others of the party were performing strangely, getting up, falling down, as, entangled in their blankets, they staggered dangerously near the edge of the rocky shelf, apparently unmindful of their peril.



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“Catch me! Jump on the rope!” yelled the guide.

Harriet’s quick eyes, now wide open, caught the significance of the scene. Without an instant’s hesitation she sprang toward Janus, fairly hurling herself upon him. One hand grabbed a taut rope that was straining with some heavy weight pulling on it at the other end.

Janus sat up as the girl threw her own weight on the line to assist in holding it until the guide should have recovered himself.

“Oh, what has happened?” cried the guardian.

“Some one is over the edge,” answered Harriet almost breathlessly. “Quick! Find out who it is.”

“It’s Tommy!” screamed Margery Brown.

Miss Elting sprang toward the edge of the shelf.

“Stop!” thundered the guide. “Careful! Don’t rush. Take it easy. All the rest of you stay back. You go cautiously to the edge, Miss Elting, and find out just what shape she’s in.”

Grubb gave his commands in a quick, business-like tone; at the same time he removed his belt and unfastened the girls’ ropes.

Margery began to scream again. Jane grasped and shook her.

“Stop that! Tommy’s doing enough howling for the whole party,” she exclaimed.

Tommy’s cries were all-sufficient—heart-rending, in fact. Harriet motioned to Jane to come and assist in holding the rope. Jane responded promptly.

“May I go and help?” questioned Harriet eagerly.

“Yes. It’s a good idea. Keep her quiet if you can,” urged Miss Elting. “She is likely to saw the rope in two at the rate she is floundering about. I hope her belt is strong enough to hold.”

“Oh my stars, what a mess!” groaned Jane McCarthy.

“It’s worse than that,” answered Janus, but he did not explain just what danger threatened the screaming little girl.

Harriet turned the rope over to her companion and hurried to the edge of the shelf, where she stretched herself on the rock with her head protruding over. What she saw



was an object that resembled a great spider suspended from a silken thread. The spider was dangling in the air, with arms and legs working frantically. The poor little spider, in this instance Tommy Thompson, was slowly turning from side to side, clawing frantically at the smooth side of the mountain when her hands got into position where she could touch it. Miss Elting was trying to soothe her. Harriet adopted a different policy.

“Tommy!” she cried sharply.

“Oh, thave me! Thave me!” wailed the little tow-headed girl.

“Do you want to drop clear to the bottom?” demanded Harriet.

“No, oh, no! Thave me! I’ll be good. I’ll—”

“You’ll be down there in a heap if you don’t stop struggling. Listen to me! Are you going to stop that screaming and do something for yourself, or are we to let you hang there until to-morrow morning?” continued Harriet.



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“Yeth, oh, yeth! I’ll be good. I’ll do whatever you tell me. But thave me. Pleathe thave me!” sobbed the unhappy little Tommy.

“Stop clawing. Let your body hang limp. Don’t make a move, and keep quiet. You confuse us. Remember, if you struggle you are likely to pull us over with you. I am going to get something; then I shall try to pull you up. Hazel and Margery, stay close to Miss Elting. Miss Elting, will you look after them while I go to hunt a stick?”

“Come over here by me, girls,” commanded the guardian in response to the request. “Now, stand perfectly still. Tommy’s life may depend upon your doing only what you are told. A Meadow-Brook Girl is a sort of soldier, and a soldier is not a good soldier unless he can take and obey orders.”

Hazel was trembling a little, Margery a great deal, but the words of the guardian served to quiet and steady both girls.

Harriet came running toward them, carrying a round stick, a piece from a small sapling that the guide had picked up for firewood. This she cautiously slipped under the rope at the edge of the shelf, prying the rope up a little in order to do so, thus sending Tommy into a fresh outburst of terror when she felt the added movement of the rope.

“Miss Elting, I think you had better manage the stick. You are not likely to lose your presence of mind. Hazel and Margery may help me pull Tommy up. Be sure not to let the rope drag over the sharp edge of the stone, or we may lose her.”

Margery indulged in a fresh attack of shivering. Hazel gripped her arm, whispering, “Brace up, dear!”

“Oh, I can—n’t,” sobbed Margery. “My knees won’t hold me up.”

“Now, girls,” called Harriet cheerily, “take hold of the rope, but be gentle about it. Remember, a sharp jolt might be a serious thing for Tommy. It might jerk Miss Elting over, too, so be very careful. Now, Tommy, we are going to pull you up. Don’t reach for the rock. It won’t help you any to do so. Just hang limp. Try to imagine that you are a bag of meal and we are pulling you up for the muffins to-morrow morning.”

“Oh, I can’t laugh,” wailed Tommy.

“Then cry, if you wish, but don’t make a noise doing it. Shed all the tears you wish to, but let them be silent tears. Now then!”

Harriet stepped back, taking firm hold of the rope. She was near the edge of the shelf, Hazel directly behind her, with Margery still farther back.



“When you are ready, Miss Elting! Let us know when you wish a fresh hold.” Harriet was perfectly calm outwardly.

“Ready!”

“All together! One, two, three—pull! Steady; not so violently. This is a small rope, and _____”

“Whoa!” interjected the guardian sharply.

“We are taking up the slack back here. Good work for you girls,” encouraged the guide.

“What is it? Oh, what is it?” screamed Tommy.



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“Stop that noise!” commanded Harriet. “Everything is all right!”

“Ready again,” commanded Miss Elting. “One, two, three—pull!”

Tommy came up about a foot this time. Her progress was slow, but it was, at least, sure.

Jane and the guide were acting as anchors, at the same time assisting in pulling on the line, holding down when the pauses came.

After every pull Miss Elting would call a halt while she worked the round stick down over the edge of the rock to keep the rope from being unduly worn. In this way Tommy came up little by little, now and then uttering a sharp scream at some unexpected jolt. Once, when the rope slipped from the round stick, Tommy felt herself slipping into unconsciousness, but pluckily recovered herself. She clenched her fists until the nails almost cut into the flesh of her hands, and all the time she was wondering if the belt that seemed to be cutting her in two would hold or break. Those on the ledge above were wondering much the same thing. They were operating with extreme caution for that very reason.

“You are almost up to us, Tommy,” encouraged the guardian. “Be very careful. Make no sudden moves. Don’t try to take hold of the edge when we get you level with it. We shall have to pull you over the last two or three feet by taking hold of you. Then we will have something to be thankful for, won’t we?”

“Yeth,” wailed a weak voice from over the side.

“Ready!”

This time Tommy came up so close that the guardian was able to touch her. Miss Elting leaned over and patted Tommy on the shoulder reassuringly.

“One more long, strong pull and we shall have you within a little way of safety. Girls, are you ready for the last pull?”

Margery was breathing heavily, Hazel, too, was taking short, excited breaths.

“Yes, when you are ready,” answered Hazel. “Get ready back there, ready to hold fast after the last pull. Don’t give way the fraction of an inch,” called Harriet. “This is like things I have read about Alpine climbing, except that I guess they don’t pull them up dangling in this fashion.”

“Pull!” called the guardian. “Steadily and slowly this time.”

The girls were breathing heavily now.



“Stop!”

“Oh, am I up?” wailed the little, lisping girl.

“Yes. Now be perfectly quiet. Harriet, can you help me?”

“Yes. All hold fast. I am going to let go. Step back a little farther, girls. There!”

“We have it,” shouted Janus.

“We have,” cried Crazy Jane.

Harriet stepped forward.

“Hold up your arm, Tommy,” directed the guardian. “You take that arm, Harriet. Now one foot, Tommy. I’ll take that. Don’t move about any more than you can help. Wait! Her arm first. Have you got it, Harriet?”

“Yes.”

Snap! Tommy uttered a wild scream of terror. Miss Elting was reaching for the upraised foot.



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Tommy's belt gave way when her foot was almost within the guardian's grasp, and her slender body shot downward.

CHAPTER XIII

PLACING THE BLAME

Such screams as rose from over the ledge none of that party ever had heard. Harriet, it will be remembered, had hold of the little girl's hands, or rather one hand, when Tommy's belt broke. The jolt was so great that it seemed to the two girls as if their arms would be pulled from their sockets.

Tommy thought, too, that she was being hurled to her death when she felt herself falling. But Harriet, with unusual presence of mind, had clutched the little girl's hand with a desperate grip.

"Give me the other hand," she panted.

"I—I can't," sobbed Tommy, who immediately began to wriggle in an attempt to reach the shelf.

"Then keep quiet. Don't stir." Instead of keeping quiet, the girl, now fairly beside herself with fear, began a series of lunges for the ridge above her. The result was what Harriet had feared. She felt herself slipping forward toward the edge. In those few seconds Harriet Burrell came nearer to realizing what fear was than ever before. To let go would be to save herself at the cost of Tommy's life. Harriet not only held on; but reached over her free hand which she clasped over that of her companion. Now she slipped more than ever. Her companions did not seem to realize what had occurred. It had all come about so quickly that they did not quite comprehend.

"Grab me!" cried Harriet. "I've got her! Why don't you do something? I'm slipping over. Quick! For mercy's sake, move!"

Jane McCarthy, who, with Janus, was still clinging to the rope, now dropped it and sprang forward. Jane went down on her knees, grasping Harriet by the ankles.

"Hold me! Are you all asleep?" shouted Jane.

Janus awakened suddenly. But Miss Elting was a little ahead of him. The guardian sprang behind Jane and slipped both arms around the latter's waist.

"Help Harriet!" she cried.



Janus ran forward with a rope, making a noose in it as he ran. The guide went down on his knees beside Harriet Burrell.

“Can you swing her a little without dropping her?” he shouted.

“Yes, but she’ll be dreadfully frightened.”

“We can’t help that. Swing her,” commanded Janus.

Harriet did so, bringing from Tommy Thompson a series of terrified screams. If any one else heard he must have believed that some one was being killed. But her shouts and screams did no harm. The guide took quick advantage of the opportunity offered by Harriet to slip the loop in the rope over one of Tommy’s feet, then draw it taut.

“I’m caught. Mercy, I’m caught!” screamed Tommy.

“Hang on to her! Don’t let go! Stop that yelling until I tell you what to do!” commanded the guide. “We’re going to pull you up the best way we can git you up. If you don’t like it, don’t fight; just yell. Hold her as she is, Miss Harriet, while I give her foot a yank.”

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He really did jerk on the rope, but more for the purpose of tightening the loop than for any other reason. Of course, the proceeding was followed by an ear-piercing scream. Janus promptly began to pull up on the line. Tommy's foot came up with it, leaving the other foot and one arm dangling in the air nearly two hundred feet from the bottom of the cliff.

"Pull when we get her level. No; the rest of you folks keep back, or we'll all be over, first thing we know. There! Over she comes!" With a final effort they had landed Tommy on the shelf. She was sobbing pitifully. Her ordeal had been sufficient to upset the strongest nerved person.

"You poor darling," cried Miss Elting, gathering the terror-stricken Tommy in her arms and staggering to the rear of the shelf, where she placed the terrified girl on a blanket.

Harriet sat back where she was. She was breathing heavily from her exertions, and further than this she admitted to herself that she was a little faint. But not for worlds would she have her companions know this.

"Better get back," advised the guide. "One is enough."

"Don't trouble about me. I will as soon as I get my breath. That was a hard position in which to do any lifting."

"I reckon. I take off my hat to you, Miss Burrell. This outfit isn't in such great need of a pilot. You could get along without me and never miss me for a minute except when it comes to toting a pack, and even then I guess you could do without me, especially if that young lady threw a dish or so overboard after every meal," he added jocularly.

"Is there any wood?"

"Yes. There you are again. I never think of anything. I get lost wondering what's going to happen next. You sit down. I'll attend to the fire. It is cold. You are shivering, aren't you?"

"I—I believe I am." Harriet got up and walked over to her companions. She walked rather unsteadily, but they were too much upset themselves to observe it. Tommy lay on a blanket with face buried in her arms, sobbing, every fourth sob being a hysterical moan. Harriet sat down beside the unhappy little girl, slipping an arm about her waist.

"It's all over now, honey. Don't cry."

"I'm thick! Pleathe give me thome—thome water."

"Water," called Harriet. "Is there any? If not, let Mr. Janus get it, if he will."



“If she can wait a few moments we’ll all have some hot coffee,” answered the guide. But Tommy could not wait. She insisted on having a drink of water, so the guide brought it to her. This seemed to take the girl’s mind from her recent fright, and lying on her back Tommy Thompson gradually became quiet and surveyed the guide’s coffee-making through half-closed eyes.

“Do you think you can go to sleep?” asked Miss Elting, stooping over the recumbent Tommy.

“Not until I get thome coffee,” answered Tommy, gazing up soulfully into the anxious face of the guardian.



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Margery laughed almost hysterically. It was the first laugh that had been heard in camp for some time, so it was welcome, helping to relieve the tension as it did. Tommy turned her eyes on her stout friend in a droll way which set Margery to giggling afresh.

The fire was crackling by this time. Harriet dragged Tommy's blanket up closer to it, that she might get some of its warmth. Janus, looking unusually solemn, was boiling water for the coffee.

"She had a pretty narrow escape," he nodded, observing Harriet's eyes upon him.

"Indeed she did," agreed Harriet, with a slight shudder.

"No more sleep for me this night," cried Crazy Jane. "It's my opinion that that wild Indian chief put a hoodoo on this rock, as well as on the lake below. I shouldn't be surprised at most anything happening here."

"Yes. Suppose the wall should fall in?" suggested Margery, gazing apprehensively up the side of the granite wall, on which the light from the fire was reflected in arrow-like shafts.

"Will you stop that?" demanded Jane. "Haven't we had trouble enough for one night without your suggesting anything else?"

"You started the subject yourself," reminded Harriet.

"Who would like a bite to eat with her coffee?" interrupted the guardian. "Tommy, would you like to have a biscuit?"

"Oh, no, thank you."

"I would," declared Margery.

"Yeth. Buthter ith never thatithfied. Thhe is always hungry," taunted Tommy.

"And you've got over your scare," added Jane significantly.

The guardian set out some biscuits and lumps of sugar on a piece of paper. The condensed milk was not brought. Everyone with the exception of Harriet and Tommy was possessed of keen appetites after their trying experiences. Janus, too, ate three biscuits and drank three cups of strong coffee.

"Better have some," he urged, glancing at Harriet, who had refused the coffee.

"I guess Harriet is ill, too," suggested Margery.



"I wish to sleep to-night. I shouldn't sleep a wink were I to drink that black stuff, nor will you."

"You watch us and see," chuckled Margery.

"Tommy, how did you come to get over the edge?" questioned the guardian, now that the little girl had begun to feel better.

"You certainly cannot blame our enemy for this accident," declared Jane.

"I wonder if he did push Tommy over?" Margery's eyes were large as she voiced the question.

"Nonsense!" retorted Harriet Burrell.

"Yes. That's what I say," agreed Miss Elting.

"I suppose she will lay it to me," chuckled the guide.

"Yeth, I ought to," nodded Tommy. "But we agreed not to fight any more, didn't we?"

"We did," he replied very gravely, "and we are not going to, are we?"

Tommy shook her head.

"Not before to-morrow, I gueth. I'm too tired to fight. Did I furnithh you with exthitement enough for one night?"



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“Will you listen to her?” laughed Crazy Jane. “Little Tommy Thompson fell off the mountain to furnish us with excitement. Of course we are satisfied. We forgive you for all your tricks, and we don’t care how much excitement you furnish if you will only keep your feet on something solid. We came within a little of all going over with you in our fright.”

“Isn’t that nithe?” glowed Tommy. She was recovering her spirits. “I thould have had company.”

“That is a very ill-timed remark, Tommy,” answered Miss Elting in a severe tone. “I am surprised at your flippancy. I really believe you enjoyed our fright.”

“Yeth. Didn’t you hear me laugh when I wath down there?”

“I wouldn’t say such things if I had made as much trouble as Tommy has,” declared Margery.

“Of courthe you wouldn’t,” agreed Tommy. “You haven’t a thenthe of humor.”

“Some people have no sense at all,” flung back Buster.

“We have forgotten something,” interrupted Harriet. “Tommy’s blanket is down there somewhere. We ought to have it before going on in the morning. You may keep mine for to-night, if you wish. You are going to sit up the rest of the night, are you not, Mr. Grubb?”

“Yes. I’ll take no more chances with this party on Sokoki Leap. I’ll keep the fire going the rest of the night, too. Fix your blankets so your feet will be toward the fire. The Indians would say, ‘Indian keep him head cool, feet warm.’”

“We have done better than that this evening,” answered Jane laughingly. “We managed to keep our head and feet warm at the same time.”

“I should say we have,” mused Harriet. “But what about the blanket? We do not wish to lose it.”

“I’ll go down and get it in the morning,” said Janus. “You needn’t wait breakfast for me; I’ll have something to eat before leaving. But do be careful. I don’t want to have the little one falling down the rocks and landing on my head when I get there. Better turn in as soon as possible, young ladies. We have a mighty hard trail ahead of us in the morning, and some more slippery granite to climb. Another thing, you’d better put another belt on Miss Thompson. You’ll find some leather and a buckle in my kit. There’s sewing material there also.”

“How far shall we have to climb?” asked Hazel.



“Bout a thousand feet, as a bird flies,” Janus answered, with a careless gesture.

“Ob, thave me!” wailed Tommy desperately. “I can’t thtand any more.”

“Why, Tommy, we’ve hardly begun yet,” Harriet retorted smilingly.

“Maybe *you* haven’t, but thome of uth have about finithed,” asserted the little, lisping girl.

“For once, Tommy and I agree,” groaned Margery.

Not long after the girls turned in for the second time that night. Daybreak would soon send its gray light into their camp on Sokoki Leap. But the day ahead of them was not fated to be, in all respects, a time of calm. Tommy Thompson and even her better-poised companions were to have further opportunities for distinguishing themselves.



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CHAPTER XIV

GIVING A TOBOGGAN POINTS

A brilliant sun, gilding the peaks of Chocorua and shining in her eyes, awoke Harriet Burrell.

A panorama of sunlit hills, still darkened caverns and gorges, precipitous cliffs and sombre ravines caused the Meadow-Brook Girls to exclaim joyously. Thin, silvery ribbons in the landscape showed where foaming brooks ran. There were short waterfalls, long cascades, bright little lakes and countless valleys of green.

"It's too beautiful to be real!" throbbed Harriet Burrell as she unwound herself from her blanket and started to replenish the fire.

The coffee pot was already on the fire, supported by two stones. It was steaming and sputtering. Then, for the first time, she observed that Janus Grubb was nowhere in sight. Harriet got up and tip-toed softly to the edge of the cliff, where she lay down flat, peering over. At first she saw nothing of interest; then all at once she caught sight of a moving speck at the foot of the cliff.

"It's Janus!" she exclaimed. "Why, he doesn't look any larger than a chessman. I wonder how much would have been left of Tommy had she fallen down there?"

Harriet shuddered at the thought of her companion's narrow escape—the narrow escape of the entire party, for that matter. Crawling cautiously back, she lay gazing off over the valley. "The poisoned lake" lay in plain view. The girl pondered over the tragedy of which the guide had told them. Such tragedies, such deeds of violence as he had named, should have no place in a peaceful scene such as this, thought Harriet.

"Harriet!" She turned her head to find Miss Elting sitting up with a worried expression on her face.

"For pity's sake, come away from there! My nerves will not stand many more such shocks as we had last night."

"Why, I am not afraid," answered Harriet.

"What are you doing there?"

"Watching Janus. He is down below. You ought to take a peep at him. He looks so small and so funny."



“Thank you. I am well satisfied to take your word for it. Will you please come away from there?”

“Certainly, if you wish it.” Harriet got up promptly and walked back, stepping over her companions, then sitting down beside the guardian.

“You are a brave little girl, Harriet, dear,” said Miss Elting softly, patting the brown head affectionately. “But don’t you think you are just a little bit foolhardy?”

“I—I hadn’t thought about it,” answered the girl, flushing. “I do not mean to be.”

“I know. You are thoughtless of your own peril. You know we must not let anything happen to any of our party. We want to have other happy summers in the open together; and, were anything serious to occur to any member of our party, that would end it. Neither your parents nor those of the other girls would permit them to go out again in this way. Will you promise to be more careful in future?”



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"I don't like to do that; I am afraid I might not keep my promise," admitted Harriet, hanging her head. "But I will promise to do the best I can and not to take any more chances than I have to."

Jane awakened at this juncture and lay blinking at them for a moment, after which she sat up, rubbing her eyes.

"Good morning, Misses Owls. Have you two been croaking there all night?"

"No, Jane, dear, we have not. We have been conversing for the past ten or fifteen minutes. Previous to that time I was peeping over the edge at Mr. Grubb, who is down there looking for Tommy's blanket. Still farther back than that I was sound asleep. Miss Elting has been reading me a lecture. It is your turn now."

Margery sat up at this juncture. She unrolled her blanket, flung it aside, and, going to the wall, sank down against it, resting her still heavy head in her hands.

"What's the matter with you, Margery?" questioned Jane.

"Matter?" complained Buster. "One might as well try to sleep in that boiler factory at Meadow-Brook as in this camp."

"That's so, Little Sunshine; I agree with you. This is a dynamite as well as a boiler factory, with an explosion twice, every day and at least once in the night."

"Dynamite?" piped Tommy. "Where ith it?"

"There, you see! You have awakened every one of us except Hazel," complained Jane. "Now, go on talking and you'll waken her, too; then we'll all be awake, and can think about cooking breakfast."

"Jane McCarthy, you can talk more and say less than any person I ever knew," exclaimed Margery petulantly.

"I agree with you, Little Sunshine. I agree with every word you have said this morning, and I'm going to come right over there and kiss you for your sweetness. Isn't she good-natured, and so early in the morning, too?" laughed Jane, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

A shout of laughter greeted Crazy Jane's naive words. The shout awakened Hazel. Margery dropped her hands from her face. Her petulant mouth relaxed into an unwilling smile; then she burst out laughing.

"I thought I'd chase away that sour face," teased Jane.



“I’ll look crosser than ever if you don’t stop,” threatened the stout girl.

One by one the girls went over to the rivulet and washed. There was not much water to be had, but it made up in coldness what it lacked in quantity and freshened them greatly. Harriet started to prepare the breakfast as soon as she had washed and dried her face and hands. The dishes were set out on the granite shelf, and there, more than two thousand feet in the air, the Meadow-Brook Girls sat down to their morning meal. Janus had not returned by the time they finished, but came in about half an hour later. He had the blanket and the handle of the frying-pan that Tommy had dropped. He said that was all there was left of the frying-pan. He thought the handle might be useful somewhere, so had brought it back with him.



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"I suggest that we take the handle home and frame it. We might give it to Tommy as a souvenir," suggested Harriet.

"Never mind. I've thouvernirth enough as it ith. I've got thouvernirth all over my perthon," declared Tommy.

"You may have more before the day is done," chuckled Jane, pointing to the heights that they were to climb that day. Tommy eyed them askance. She did not fancy what was before her, but with a sigh of resignation went about getting her pack ready for starting. The other girls were now doing the same, Janus passing on the packs after they had been made ready. To have a pack come open while climbing a steep mountain would mean the loss of almost everything in that pack. But the danger of this was not so great now as though the luggage were being carried on pack horses.

The start was made in a leisurely manner. Janus halted every little while to point out some interesting feature of the landscape, or to relate some legend of the past associated with this or that particular bit of mountain scenery. An hour had been occupied in this easy jogging before they came to the sheer climb that lay before them. This latter was more than a thousand feet, but the guide proposed to take the greater part of the day for it. There was no need for haste, as the journey could be made easily before night.

As one gazed up the jagged side it did not seem possible that anything other than a bird could make the ascent. It looked a sheer wall from where the girls stood, the projections and jutting crags appearing perfectly flat to them. Even Harriet Burrell and Miss Elting were a little dubious.

"Do you think it safe?" questioned the guardian apprehensively.

"No. Mountain climbing is never safe," replied Janus. "It can be done, and easily at that, if that's what you mean. Shall we go ahead or go back, Miss?"

"Ahead, of course," the guardian nodded.

Janus got his line ready, a small but strong and pliant rope. He nodded to his party, glanced up for the most favorable starting point, then began to go up. The Meadow Brook Girls followed in single file. Miss Elting bringing up the rear. Now the guide passed the rope to them as the ascent became more precipitous. Up and up wound the trail. The climbers kept a firm grip on the life line, for a misstep here would mean a bad tumble, and might take others down also. At times the girls were out of sight of each other, like the ends of a train rounding a sharp curve. The advice of the guide to "look up, never down," was followed by each one. In fact, none dared to look down, fearing to lose her head and grow dizzy.

[Illustration: Up and up wound the trail.]

“We rest here,” announced Janus, after they had been climbing for an hour without once stopping during that time. It was not a particularly desirable place in which to rest, being located on a steep slope, but the spot was surrounded by bushes, so that, when all came together and sat down, they could see nothing of the rugged mountain scenery about them.



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“Better get out some biscuit or something to munch on, for we shan’t find a place where we can cook a meal until we get nearly to the top. We’ll have to rest hanging on by our eyelids after this,” declared Janus.

“No more mountain climbing for me,” declared Margery.

“This is nothing,” chuckled the guide. “Wait until you climb Mt. Washington.”

“Wait until I do!” nodded Margery with emphasis.

“That is to be our next,” Miss Elting informed them. “By the time we have finished that I think we shall be seasoned mountain climbers.”

“Yeth. And we’ll have the habit so badly that we’ll be climbing telephone poleth every day when we get home,” averred Tommy. “I withh my father could thee me now. He wouldn’t thay hith little girl wath lathy, would he?”

Janus got up and walked out where he could look about him. He stood stroking his whiskers reflectively, glancing critically at the rocks above; then along a narrow, barely indicated trail around the side of the mountain. He turned on his heel and returned to where his party lay stretched out on the rocks. There were rents in their clothing, their boots were scratched and cut from contact with sharp points of rocks, and the faces of the Meadow-Brook Girls were red and perspiring.

“I reckon we’ll go around another way,” decided Janus. “It’s too steep here. You’ll ruin your clothes. No need of it at all. You will get just as much fun out of the roundabout way as by climbing straight up.”

At first the girls protested that they did not wish to take the easier way, but when he assured them it was just as hazardous, they were satisfied.

“This new way we will see some scenery that is scenery, and you’ll have a chance to look at it, which you wouldn’t have in the straight-up climb. You see, you’d be too busy hanging on. I wanted to show you the ‘Slide’ anyway,” he added.

“What ith the ‘Thlide’?” questioned Tommy.

“You will see when you get to it; one of the curiosities of Chocorua, and a lively one. They say the Indians used it when in a hurry to get down the mountain or to escape from their enemies. But, mind you, I don’t expect any of you young ladies to follow the example of the Indians. Now, shall we move along?”

Interested in this new proposal, the girls sprang up, eagerly announcing their readiness to push on. Janus led the way to the right, instead of following the perpendicular trail.



The former trail led them around a jutting point of rock, then over boulders, irregular slabs and crags, obliging them to pick their way with caution and cling to the life line.

They were now following a sort of spiral; for, though the party seemed to be encircling the mountain, they were rising gradually toward the blue dome of the summit. Here and there a mountain bird, dislodged from its perch, would hurl itself out into space, giving the girls a start, and threatening, for the moment, their equilibrium. But they did much better than the guide had hoped for. Greatly to his relief, he was not obliged to go to the rescue of a Meadow-Brook Girl that day.

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About noon, however, Margery Brown got a blister on her right heel, and Hazel turned one of her ankles. This put an end to the mountain climbing for the time being, but not to the hanging-on. The girls perched themselves behind rocks for support while the guardian was dressing the sprain and the blister. Janus went on to look over the trail and pick out the easy places. While they were waiting for Miss Elting to attend to Margery and Hazel, the guide returned with an armful of dry sticks.

“We aren’t going to starve even if we can’t move on,” he cried cheerily. “I promised you that you shouldn’t have a warm meal until we reached the summit this evening. I’m going to give you a surprise, though. Now, what will you have?”

“I think I’ll have a thirloin thteak,” answered Tommy.

“A cup of coffee will help me, I am sure,” declared Harriet.

“I would eat the frying-pan handle if I couldn’t get anything better,” added Jane. “Mountain climbing is something like work, eh?”

Janus bolstered up his dry wood in a crotch formed by a jutting rock, and built a fire where one would scarcely have believed it were possible to do so. He got water from a little spring just above them, and by the time Miss Elting had disposed of her patients for the moment the water for coffee was boiling. But there was no setting of a table. To have put a dish down on that slope would have meant to lose it, and they had too few dishes to be able to afford to lose even one.

The coffee was drunk without milk, though lumps of sugar were produced from each girl’s blouse pocket and dropped into her cup with much laughter. They made the best of their circumstances; but when, about the middle of the afternoon, Miss Elting informed the guide that she did not think Hazel’s ankle would permit of her going any further that day, there was a flurry in the mountainside camp.

The guide declared that they must go on until a suitable camping place were reached, but how he did not say until he had consulted his whiskers and studied the valleys below. He then gravely announced that he would carry Hazel on his back. She promptly declared that she would not permit it, and Miss Elting agreed with her. Then Janus rose to the occasion by telling them that he would make a litter if one of the young ladies thought she could bear up one end of it. Both Harriet and Jane settled the matter by declaring they could carry the litter with Hazel in it.

Janus made the litter by first laying two ropes on the ground about eighteen inches apart. On these at right angles he tied sticks until the affair resembled a carrier belt on a piece of machinery. A loop with a stick rove into it was arranged at each end and a blanket was thrown over the litter, which was then pronounced ready. None of them ever had seen anything like it. The girls feared the litter would sag so that no one could



ride on it without being dragged along the ground. Janus said the advantage in a rope litter was that they could go around a bend with it and not break the side pieces, and, furthermore, that it was soft and had plenty of give. Jane winked at Harriet, Hazel looked troubled, while Tommy's face assumed a wise expression.



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“Now for the start,” called the guide, taking the front end of the litter, after all was in readiness. “The one who takes the other end had better not carry her pack, but lay it on the litter.”

“I prefer to have my pack on my back. I know where it is then,” remarked Harriet.

“Now, hadn’t we better strap Hazel to the litter?” proposed Jane thoughtfully.

“It is not necessary. There’s no danger,” declared the guide promptly.

“All right, then,” nodded Harriet. “But, Hazel, if you wish my advice, you’ll take pains to hold fast.”

The leader of the Meadow-Brook Girls lifted the loop over one shoulder, passing it under one arm with the end stick resting slantingly across her back. Janus took up the other end after Miss Elting had carefully helped Hazel upon the litter, which tilted dangerously.

“Be careful not to drop me,” begged Hazel. “It’s a shame I’m so helpless that I have to be carried, though Mr. Grubb says it isn’t far to the camping spot.”

“Pick your way carefully, bearers,” urged Miss Elting.

“Wait! Let me get ahead of you,” begged Tommy, scrambling forward. “I don’t like the lookth of that thing.” Miss Elting and Jane followed behind the litter, with which Harriet and Janus made good progress, though Hazel had to do some clever balancing in order to keep the affair right side up.

For nearly half an hour the two bearers bore their burden without halting. It proved easier work than Harriet had expected, and perhaps that fact gave her too great assurance. The way was growing steeper and narrower, with sharp fragments of rock on the trail, and below them, alongside, the tops of dwarfed mountain trees.

All at once Harriet stubbed her toe, plunging forward and tilting the litter so that it turned turtle, like a cranky hammock. With a little scream of alarm Hazel Holland pitched out headfirst and took a graceful, curving dive into the top of a tree just below them. The others saw her feet disappear in the foliage, heard a muffled cry for assistance, then silence.

CHAPTER XV

LEAVING THE TRAIL IN A HURRY

Janus was pulled from his feet. He pitched sideways, saving himself by grasping a projection with one hand; then, in his struggles to get up, both feet became entangled in



the rope litter, and there he lay kicking and shouting to the girls to go after the unfortunate Hazel.

Jane McCarthy already had got into action. Without an instant's hesitation she clambered down the rocks and made her way to the base of the mountain tree.

"She isn't here," shouted Crazy Jane. "What do you suppose has happened to her?"

"Wait! I'll be right with you," answered Harriet.

"She must be in the tree still," cried Miss Elting. "I hope she isn't hurt."

"If she were not we should hear her." Harriet was down the rocks, reaching the bottom not more than a minute behind Jane McCarthy who was just climbing the tree. It was not possible to see far up into the tree on account of the dense foliage. Harriet waited at the foot while her companion climbed it rapidly.



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"I've got her," Jane called down. "She has fainted. What shall I do?"

"Get her down," urged Miss Elting.

"I can't. She is fast."

"Wait! I will be with you at once," called Harriet. "Will some one bring a rope, please?" Tommy, Margery and the guardian were scrambling down the rocks. Janus, having extricated himself from the litter, had picked it up and was on his way down to where Hazel had fallen by another path.

"Consarn the luck!" he grumbled. "Can't go a mile without something breaking loose. Never saw anything like it in all my born days. Anything wrong there?"

"Yes, seriously wrong," answered Miss Elting.

"Please send the guide up here. We can't get her out without assistance," called down Harriet.

"Janus!" The guide stepped briskly at Miss Elting's incisive command. He shinned up the tree without loss of time.

"Well, I swum!" he muttered.

Hazel's injured ankle had caught in a crotch of the tree. She was lying across one of the thick lower limbs of the tree, unconscious and with blood trickling from her face. Harriet was trying to get under her shoulders in order to lift her up somewhat and relieve the strain. Janus crawled up to Jane, who sat beside the unconscious girl.

"Well, I swum!" he exclaimed.

"Do something!" exploded Jane. "Do you want us to tell you what to do?"

"No, Miss; I know."

"Pardon me. I didn't mean to be rude. Only get Hazel out of the tree. She must have help at once. Go down and help Harriet lift her. I'll try to get her foot out of the crotch of the tree when you lift her off the limb. But be careful and don't lose your hold on her."

"If you will come here and support Hazel's shoulders I think I shall be able to do better by lifting her at the waist," suggested Harriet. "I am afraid you had better remain down there, Miss Elting," she called as the guardian made ready to climb the tree; "there isn't room for all of us. Besides, the tree might break. I don't know how strong these limbs really are. You might have one of the girls bring a blanket. There is one on top of the tree, but we can't get it."



Tommy climbed back to the trail, throwing a blanket down. In the meantime, Jane had got down and was supporting Hazel's head and shoulders. Harriet braced herself, back and feet, against the limbs of the tree, both arms about the waist of the imprisoned, unconscious girl. Janus was working cautiously at the captive foot.

"Raise her a little. Whoa! Hold her there."

It was not an easy task for the two girls to follow orders in that instance, but they did, their faces growing red under the strain. Hazel was moaning.

"Miss Elting; the smelling salts!" called Harriet.

The guardian passed them up, Jane grasping the bottle and placing it under Hazel's nostrils.



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“Lift a little more. That’s enough.” Janus was working the ankle up a little at a time.
“Can you hold her?”

“Yes. Tell us when you have freed the foot, please. You will have to steady her. Hold her feet together, if possible. That will make it easier for us. We mustn’t drop her.”

“One more lift and—whoa! It’s free!”

Harriet knew that without his saying so. A sudden weight was thrown on her arms, nearly tipping her over. Harriet’s face grew red under the strain. Glancing up, she saw that the injured foot was indeed free.

“Let go, Jane, but watch her head to see that it doesn’t get bumped.”

“You can’t handle her alone, darlin’. Better let me help you,” counseled Jane.

“Yes I can. But be ready to catch her in case anything goes wrong. Please don’t try to help her down to me, Mr. Grubb, you’ll surely throw me over if you do,” warned Harriet.
“Miss Elting, you and the girls hold a blanket to catch her if we should let her fall.”

Space was so limited in the tree that everyone up there was laboring under great difficulties.

“Better let me get down there,” suggested Janus.

Harriet shook her head. She was slowly righting the now half unconscious girl, every muscle trembling under the strain she was putting upon it.

“Hooray!” cried Crazy Jane.

“I swum, but she is strong,” muttered Janus admiringly. “I reckon——” He did not complete what he had started to say. A warning snap told him that something was giving way.

Harriet had heard and understood. She shifted her weight to one foot, but the combined weight of the two was too much for the limb. It broke from under her with amazing suddenness.

“Catch us!” screamed Harriet.

Jane grabbed frantically for Harriet and her burden as they came crashing down. But, instead of lending assistance, Jane pulled Harriet toward her just as the latter was reaching out one hand for a limb by which to break the fall. She missed the limb of the tree by an inch or so. Jane’s effort threw her off her balance also. The three girls went crashing down.



“Hold the blanket hard!” shouted Harriet. Then, with rare presence of mind, she let go of her burden. The object in doing this was that Hazel might land on the upraised blanket and thus break her fall. Harriet reasoned that she and Jane were better able to take care of themselves than was Hazel in her half unconscious condition. Hazel reached the blanket first, but her fall was of such force that the blanket was jerked from the hands of Miss Elting and her two charges. However, the blanket had served to break the fall of the unfortunate mountain climber.

The next instant the other two girls came tumbling down, but they fell feet first.

“Out of the way!” cried Jane.



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Harriet threw herself to one side in order not to fall directly on Hazel, whom those below had had no time to get out of the path of the others. The result of Harriet's throwing herself sideways was that she fell heavily on her side. She lay still. Jane came straight down, reaching the rocks on all fours right over Hazel. The shock was a severe one, and, for the moment, Jane feared she had broken both wrists. Miss Elting dragged her aside, then drew Hazel from beneath the tree. This move was made just in time, for at that juncture something else occurred: Janus Grubb lost his footing and came crashing down.

Janus landed in a heap on the gray blanket. The fall stunned him briefly. But no one gave any heed to Janus. Miss Elting, Tommy and Margery were working over Hazel.

"Look after Harriet," directed the guardian sharply.

"Oh, my dear, are you hurt?" begged Margery.

"I—I don't know. My side hurts. Let me lie still a little. I—I guess I shall be all right soon."

"Well, I swum!" grunted the guide, getting unsteadily to his feet. "I swum!"

Jane was sitting on the ground, a little dazed from her fall. She stood up and leaned against the tree; then, observing that Harriet's face was pale, she staggered over and sat down heavily beside her friend.

"Oh, what a mess!" she groaned. "Are you hurt, darlin'?"

"No!" Harriet sat up determinedly, but the effort gave her pain. She winced a little, but made no sound.

"My kingdom for a motor car!" cried Jane.

"Let me help you, Harriet." Harriet attempted to rise, but had to sit down again. Jane slipped an arm about her waist and lifted the girl to her feet. "Hadn't you better not sit down, darlin'?"

"I feel better standing up. Hazel isn't much injured, is she, Miss Elting?"

"I can't find that there is anything very serious. I think she must have bumped her head in falling through the tree. She certainly has not added to the beauty of her face."

Hazel shook her head and essayed a smile.

"Did I fall gracefully?" she asked plaintively.



“Will you listen to her?” laughed Jane. “You did it as gracefully as the lady who dived from the top of a house into a tank full of water at the county fair last year.”

“What I can’t understand is why Tommy should have missed such an opportunity to distinguish herself,” smiled the guardian.

“I thtood athide tho Januth could dithtinguith himthelf,” lisped Tommy.

“Well, I swum! I did it, too, didn’t I? I’m not fit to guide a plow, but I never found it out till I tried to pilot this outfit over the hills.”

“Are thethe the hillth?” questioned Tommy.

“Yes, Miss.”

“Then, excuthe me from the mountainth.”

“I believe my tumble has cured my sprained ankle,” declared Hazel. “I can’t feel any pain at all there, except the smart where the skin is broken. Let me put on my boot.” Miss Elting slipped it on for her, and assisted Hazel to her feet. “It is all right,” cried the girl. “Isn’t that strange?”



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"Yeth. Thome thingth make thome folkth forget thome other thingth," observed Tommy sagely. "Have you forgotten your troubleth, Harriet?"

"I think so, Tommy. I will race you up to the trail."

"No; I can't rathe you up a hill, though I can fall down the hill fathter than you can, but I will help you up."

"I'll do all the helping," Janus informed them. "Shall I carry Miss Holland?"

Hazel declared that she could walk and she did, with some assistance from Miss Elting. The others were able to take care of themselves, though Harriet's side pained her frightfully with every step. She uttered no complaint, pluckily keeping her distress to herself, but the guardian knew by the expression on the girl's face that she was in pain.

Returning to the party a brief conference was held, at which they decided to proceed and make the "Slide" if possible before dark. There was no possibility of getting beyond that, but on the following day it would be necessary to make all haste, for the provisions would not hold out for more than another day, and even then they would have to go on short rations for the last two meals. It was a used-up party that started for the "Slide" that afternoon. Had they but known it, they were destined to be still more weary before they retired that night. The excitement of the day was not by any means ended. Dusk was upon them before they came out on more level ground and headed for the site chosen for their camp.

CHAPTER XVI

"Such A lovely slide"

"I believe I am tired out," declared Harriet laughingly. She sat down, then straightened and lay at full length on the ground.

"Thank goodness for a level spot on which to lay one's weary bones!" sighed Margery, stretching herself beside Harriet. There was moss over the rocks and it felt soft and restful to their aching bodies. Hazel was not far behind the other two girls in lying down. The little company were quite ready to rest.

"Girls, you mustn't lie there without blankets under you," warned the guardian.

"We are not going to lie here, Miss Elting," replied Harriet. "We are going to get up at once and prepare supper for our hungry selves. Oh, but my feet are tired!"

"Mine weigh a ton," declared Margery.



“Yeth, I imagine they do,” said Tommy with a knowing nod.

“You can go on resting if you like, Harriet. Jane, Tommy and I can get the supper.”

“And Janus,” added the guide. “You’ve done finely, young ladies. I’d like to see any young men go through a hard day as well as you have. Why, they would have been laid out along the trail from here to Sokoki Leap. We’d have had to send a couple of men with a stretcher to pick some of them up. Let me tell you something. You are trotting Janus Grubb a lively race, and he isn’t ashamed to say so. Any one who says girls haven’t as much pluck and endurance as boys may have an argument with Janus Grubb at any time.”



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“Thome girlth,” corrected Tommy.

“Yes, some girls. That’s what I meant—you girls in particular. It’s a pity all girls don’t slant in the same direction. Miss Thompson, if you will pick out some stones for the stove I will rustle the wood. No, not that way. I swum! You’ll be down the Slide if I don’t watch you.”

“The Slide!” exclaimed the girls, turning eagerly to the guide.

“Yes. We’re at it now. Where’d you think we were?”

“O, where is it?” questioned Harriet eagerly.

“Come here, I’ll show you. Everybody that’s able to walk come here, so you’ll know where it is, then there won’t be any excuse for your walking into it in the dark. There!”

All they could see was a slight depression in the rocks. It was several feet wide, very steep and so smooth that its polished surface reflected the light from the match that the guide lighted.

Harriet tossed a stone over on the smooth surface. They heard it sliding and rattling down, terminating in a faint splash.

“My goodness! Is there water down there?” exclaimed Crazy Jane.

“Yes, a pond or a pool, whatever you wish to call it. I was telling you about the Indians who used to take the Slide here. I know two young fellows who took it just to be smart. One was unhurt but the other had to be fished out of the pool. He was taken with a cramp and almost died before they got him. But this Slide isn’t a circumstance to the one over on Moosilauke. That one is nigh to a thousand feet long. That ends in a lake, too. I’d like to see any fresh young gentleman take *that* slide.”

“Harriet could do it,” declared Tommy.

“Harriet is not going to try it, my dear young friend,” retorted Harriet laughingly. “She has had quite enough falls to satisfy her. Besides, she values her life, liberty and happiness.”

“How long is this slide, Mr. Grubb?” asked the guardian.

“Over a hundred feet,” replied the guide, measuring the distance with his eye.

“Oh, what a lovely thlide!” bubbled Tommy. “How funny it would be to thee Buthter toboggan down that thlide! Wouldn’t that be funny, Mith Elting?”



“All of you keep away from here,” ordered the guide. “I’ll lose my reputation if what we have already experienced gets out. Nobody will want a guide who can’t take care of his party better than I’ve done.”

“You aren’t to blame,” replied Harriet. “It has been just Meadow-Brook luck, that is all. We always have plenty of excitement. Why, it is tripping right along ahead of us all the time, though we do not always catch sight of it until too late to stop. We will keep away from the Slide until morning. I want to see it before we leave, and so do the other girls. Maybe we might have some fun bowling stones down it. Are there any big ones that we may roll down, Mr. Grubb?”

“There’s a whole mountain of them.”



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"Hooray!" cried Crazy Jane. "We will have a rolling bee in the morning, and Margery and Tommy shall bring the stones for us."

"Yeth. Buthter will fetch the thtoneth, too. It will be good exerthithe for her."

"Grace Thompson, if you don't stop making remarks about me I'll never speak to you again as long as I live," threatened Margery.

Tommy did not reply to this awful threat. She appeared to ponder deeply over it, then, edging up closer to her companion, gazed up into the latter's face with twinkling eyes.

"Do you mean that, really and truly?"

"Yes, I do."

Tommy shook her head.

"I'm tho thorry I teathed you, Buthter, but you know that you do need exerthithe," repeated Tommy.

"Tommy!" expostulated Margery hopelessly.

"There! You did thpeak to me! you did thpeak to me!" cried Tommy, dancing about and clapping her hands. "You didn't mean it at all. You thee, I knew you didn't really and truly mean it. Oh, I'm tho glad!" She danced about until Janus laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Do you see where you're getting to? In a second more you'd have been taking the Slide on your head." Janus led her away from the dangerous spot. Miss Elting walked over to Tommy and placed a firm hand on the shoulder of the heedless little girl.

"Tommy, why will you be so careless? You distress me very much," rebuked the guardian.

"I'm thorry, Mith Elting. I'll try to be good after thith. But I didn't fall into the tree thith afternoon, nor out of it either, did I?"

"Her point is well taken," answered Harriet. "Nearly every one of us, except Tommy, distinguished herself this afternoon. How about our supper?"

"Oh-h-h-h!" chorused the girls. "We forgot all about it."

"Yeth, Mr. Januth. I'll fetch the thtoneth for the thtove. You get the wood, and we will have a nithe, warm thupper and have a nithe vithit, and then a nithe thleep and pleathant dreamth. Won't we, Buthter?"



“If you give us the opportunity,” answered Margery sourly.

“Thee! Buthter thpoke to me again,” chuckled the little, lisping girl. Harriet took her by the arm and led her gently back to the campsite, which was now so enshrouded in darkness that they were barely able to locate their packs.

Harriet assisted Tommy in getting stones of the proper size for their stove, after which these stones were piled and made ready for the fire that the guide was to start when he returned with the wood. Little more could be done without light. Hazel got the lantern from a pack, only to find that the globe had been broken. Very soon, however, the cook-fire was snapping and crackling, the girls sitting near it with elbows on their knees. Then came supper. It was wonderful what a difference there was in their appetites, now that they were out in the open, compared to them at home. But there was not as much to eat here as there would have been at home in Meadow-Brook. What there was seemed the best ever served to a company of hungry girls.

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Supper over, it was not many minutes before the girls sought their beds. They were more tired than at any time on their journey, for this had been a day long to be remembered, the fifteenth. They would post it up in their rooms to look at every day through the winter and think of the excitement, the peril and the joys that marked that day of their vacation.

The girls rolled themselves in their blankets, Indian fashion, as before mentioned. They were beginning to enjoy this way of sleeping, wrapped up like mummies, feeling warm and comfortable in the soft blankets. No one who has not tried this method of sleeping in the open in cool weather can have the slightest idea of the blissfulness of it. Of course, if there are insects they will find one. There were insects on Chocorua and they found the Meadow-Brook Girls, creeping over their faces, getting into their hair, but failing to find their way under the tightly rolled blankets. The girls were as wholly oblivious to the insects as to the chattering squirrels that leaped from one rolled figure to another, then off up the rocks, only to return again and take up their game of "leap" over the sleeping Meadow-Brook Girls.

The day had no more than dawned when Tommy was awake, unrolling herself, but taking the precaution to see where the unrolling would land her. She had not forgotten her experience at Sokoki Leap, or the fall from the shelf into space. This ground was fairly level and there were no jumping-off places, except the Slide. She was not rolling in that direction. Freeing herself, Tommy shook Margery awake, then began calling her companions. Janus sat up, took account of the time and lay back for another nap.

"Januth ith taking hith beauty thleep," observed Tommy wisely.

Margery complained at being called so early; but when Tommy told her they were going to skip stones down the Slide, Buster was all eagerness to be up and at it. The girls did not even take the time to wash their faces, but ran to the Slide and gazed timidly down its slippery way.

"Come on. Let'th get thome thtoneth," urged Grace. She uttered a merry shout as the first round stone rolled down the Slide, bumping from side to side, finally landing with a splash in the pond, sending up a little white geyser of spray. Buster also began to take a more active interest in life. She, too, shouted as she sent a fair-sized boulder spinning down the incline.

"My, what a racket!" cried Jane. "Harriet, shall we go join the game?"

"I am getting ready as fast as I can. You had better remain quiet for a time yet, Hazel."

Hazel said she would. Miss Elting also lay gazing up at the sky, following with her eyes the flight of the birds, many of which, high in the air, were soaring toward the east to meet the coming of the day.



Harriet picked up a boulder on her way to the Slide, and, reaching there, sent it spinning with the wrist movement peculiar to bowlers. The boulder skipped some rods out into the pond far below them before it sank under the water and disappeared, leaving a white trail in its wake.



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"I can do that," declared Tommy Thompson.

Janus unwound himself from his blanket and stood with his hands in pockets, observing the jolly party.

"Don't lean over too far forward when you throw," warned Harriet.

"You jutht watch me. I'm going to make thith one thkip clear acroth the pond. Here it goeth. Oh, what a lovely Thlide!"

In her excitement, Tommy leaped to the end of the slippery course, jumping up and down. In her left hand she held another round stone ready to send it after the previous throw before the latter should have reached the pond. Margery was standing at hand ready to send hers down.

"Look out!" warned Harriet, who saw the danger of Grace's position. "Get back instantly!" Both she and Jane started on a run, fearing the result of Tommy's imprudence. But they were too late.

Tommy Thompson's feet slipped from under her. With a scream she plunged head first to the Slide, starting down it on her stomach.

"Catch her!" screamed Jane.

Margery made a frantic effort to do so. Then her feet, too, went out from under her, but in making a desperate attempt to recover her balance, Margery turned completely around, landing on her back on the slippery Slide.

"Hold your breath," screamed Harriet, starting to run again, for she had halted instinctively as she saw the two girls lose their footing. Jane followed. Janus stood fairly paralyzed with amazement. It had all come about with such suddenness that he had had no time in which to collect his thoughts. When he did, he uttered a yell.

"Come back!" he roared.

But the two girls were past coming back for the time being. The third girl, Harriet Burrell, was running toward the upper end of the Slide, having made a short detour to enable her to get exactly in line with it. Now she raised herself on her tiptoes, at the same time bending over and taking a low, shooting leap, dived headfirst to the Slide, down which she shot at a dizzy rate of speed.

"Oh, she'll be killed!" Crazy Jane halted at the top, gazed down the long, slippery rock, then plumped herself down on the Slide in a sitting posture. She was on her way before she found time to change her mind. When she did change her mind it did her no good, so far as changing the situation was concerned. A procession of Meadow-Brook Girls



was well started on a perilous journey, the result of which could not be foreseen by the three members of the party left in the camp.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT CAME OF SHOOTING THE CHUTE

Miss Elting had begun to unwind herself the instant her attention had been called to Grace Thompson's perilous position at the head of the chute. Hazel Holland also had rolled over to free herself of the blankets. But before either of them had succeeded in getting to her feet, Tommy had taken the long dive, followed, as the reader already knows, by Margery, and later by Harriet Burrell and Jane McCarthy.



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"They'll be killed! Oh, those girls!" wailed the guardian. "Go after them, Janus."

"They are quite likely to be," observed the guide huskily. "I can go after them, but I can't stop them. There they are."

They heard the splash—in fact, several distinct splashes—faint, it is true, but sufficient to tell those in the camp that the girls had reached their destination, the pond at the foot of the Slide. Janus already was racing down the mountain, jumping, stumbling, falling now and then, but making his way down as rapidly as possible.

"Remain here, Hazel," commanded Miss Elting. Then she, too, hurried down, making even better time than did the guide, for the guardian was more agile and much lighter on her feet.

Fortunately for Tommy, she had been headed straight along the center of the Slide from the beginning. The chute sloped somewhat toward the middle. Tommy had instinctively kept her head up, arms thrust straight ahead of her. She began gasping for breath, and, either obeying Harriet's direction or the instinct of the swimmer, she closed her lips tightly and held her breath. Her little body flashed through a thick growth of bushes that hung over the chute at one point. She had seen the bushes coming at her like a projectile and instinctively lowered her head before reaching them. But she quickly raised her head again, uttering an exclamation, as the skin was neatly peeled from the bridge of her nose.

"Oh, thave me!" groaned Tommy, as the pond rose up to meet her. She caught and held her breath. When she struck the water a sheet of it rose up on each side of her just as the water does at the launching of a steamship, only there was much less displacement in Tommy's case. To her amazement she skimmed along the surface a few feet before she began to settle. Unfortunately, at about that time Tommy opened her mouth for a breath of fresh air. Instead she got a mouthful of water. She began to kick and struggle.

Down went Tommy, still struggling and kicking and striking out blindly, for the girl had not yet recovered from the shock. It was while she was down that another girlish figure shot straight into the lake. Instead of skimming the surface this second figure came down on her back with a mighty splash, turned a half-somersault, landing on her feet, where she stood treading water and screaming.

Now a third figure shot down the chute. It took the water in a clean dive, going clear under, passing close by where Margery was treading water and screaming for help. When Harriet finally did come up, shaking the water from eyes and head, she was seen to be only a few feet from Grace, who now was making a great splashing on her way to the opposite shore. Tommy could not speak as yet, but she could swim, and swim she did.



Observing that Tommy was not in immediate need of assistance, Harriet turned back toward Margery, who plainly was expending her strength without accomplishing very much. Harriet was just in time to see Jane McCarthy sit down in the pond. She made a great disturbance, added to which was a wild yell as she felt the water rising about her. Jane went into the water over her head. Margery, seized by a panic, forgot to tread water and went clear to the bottom.



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Harriet, still gasping for breath from her long slide and the dive under water following, plunged ahead and dived again. She came up with the struggling, choking Buster firmly gripped in one hand. Margery was trying to grasp Harriet, and the latter was experiencing some difficulty in keeping out of her clutches. Tommy, in the meantime, had reached the other side of the pond and crawled up on the shore, where she lay complaining to herself, watching the struggle in the water with wide-open eyes. Now and then she shouted a suggestion.

"Oh, my stars!" cried Jane. Coming up, she splashed about in the pond trying to get her bearings. Then, seeing Harriet's struggle with Margery, Jane headed for them in a series of porpoise-like lunges. The last reach brought a hand in contact with one of Margery's feet. Jane gave it a mighty tug. "Put her under, put her under! That'll stop her!" shouted Jane.

"Let go, Jane," called Harriet. "She is all right now. She has her bearings now. Let us see if she has forgotten how to swim." Harriet threw Margery off. The latter splashed and floundered in the cold water, then all at once struck off for the shore. She reached it and scrambled to the bank, up which she staggered and sank whimpering to the earth.

Jane and Harriet swam shoreward. Jane was laughing almost hysterically. Though she felt chilled and exhausted, Harriet's eyes twinkled. The two struggled to the bank, there to sit down laughing.

"Are you safe?" shouted Miss Elting.

"Hoo-e-e-e!" answered the two girls.

"Are you all right, Tommy?" Harriet next called across the pond.

"Yeth, but I'm *almotht* wet and cold. My clothes are thoaked, and there are ithicleth hanging from my eyebrowth. Thomebody better thave me?"

"Come over here," proposed Harriet, teasingly, "and we will."

"I can't," Tommy replied, with a shake of her head. "Too many thraight, high rockth in the way."

"Swim across, darlin'," urged Jane.

"Can't do that either, the water ith too cold."

"Then you'll have to stay where you are," laughed Jane. "If you get hungry, come over and I'll give you a biscuit to take back there with you."



“Girls, I feel so relieved,” cried Miss Elting, running down to join them. “But why did you do such a foolish thing?”

“We came after Tommy,” replied Miss McCarthy. “If that were foolish, we apologize.”

“Tommy,” ordered Miss Elting, “come here!”

“I can’t,” complained the little one.

“We’ll have to go after her,” sighed Harriet, “or the little goose will stay there. Miss Elting, how would you like to take a nice, cool morning swim?”

“No, thank you,” replied the guardian, with a little shiver. “Here is Janus. You see that my girls are all valiant, Mr. Grubb.”

There was a note of pride in the guardian’s voice.

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“Well, I swum!” was the guide’s greeting. “Ye did do it!”

“Yes, sir; and I shouldn’t mind doing it again. Oh, it was such sport, Miss Elting. Please, may we go up and have another slide?” begged Harriet.

“Oh, goodness, yes. Please let us,” urged Jane.

“By no means. I am amazed that you should ask such a thing. I forbid it. Please get Tommy, if you are going to. She will stay there as long as we will wait here. I really don’t know what I am going to do with Tommy.”

“I wish you would do something, Miss Elting. She surely will be the death of me. Think of me, with my weak heart, having to submit to such terribly exciting adventures,” complained Margery.

“Just listen to Buster,” chuckled Crazy Jane. “We must be so very careful of her.”

“Well, I suppose we might as well get in if we are going to,” decided Harriet. “We can’t be any wetter than we are, Jane.”

“But we can be colder. All right. I’m with you.”

Harriet dived in to get the shock over, coming up blowing. A splash followed hers and Jane came up beside her, shaking the water from her head and ears.

“My, but it’s cold, isn’t it, darlin’,” she gasped.

“Cold as a snowbank,” answered Harriet.

“I’ll race you to the other side.”

“Go you! Now!”

How the water did fly as they struck out in overhand strokes, shouting and laughing, cheered on by Miss Elting and Margery, on the other side by the irrepressible Tommy, who was dancing up and down on the shore, shouting and clapping her hands in great glee! The swimmers landed, laughing merrily as they made for shore. But they did not wait to argue with Tommy. Instead they picked her up bodily and tossed her into the pond. Tommy screamed and tried to fight, but she had little opportunity for resistance before she went in with a splash.

They sprang in after her, pulling the girl down, she having got to her feet in the meantime.

“Swim! swim, or we will hold your head under!” threatened Jane.



Tommy refused to swim.

“Grab her foot. We’ll tow her,” commanded Harriet. Suiting the action to the word, she grasped one of Tommy’s ankles, and throwing herself on her back began to swim with feet and free arm for the opposite side of the pond.

“Hooray!” cried Jane, making a couple of leaps forward, and getting a firm hold of the other ankle of the now loudly screaming Tommy. “Toot, toot! The tug is going ahead. How do you like being towed, darlin’?”

Tommy’s yells indicated that she did not fancy it, especially being towed feet first. Her head went under water almost instantly. Tommy was obliged to help herself or drown. She began working her arms, trying to keep her head above water, but found it awkward swimming that way. She never had tried the feet first style of swimming. No one of the party ever had, except Harriet, who could make very good progress that way.



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“Hold your breath, dear,” suggested Harriet sweetly. “You will not swallow so much water that way.”

“How—how long must I hold it?”

“Not more than five minutes,” comforted Crazy Jane.

“Thave——” She did not complete the sentence, because a volume of water rolled into her open mouth.

They had nearly reached the middle of the pond, when Harriet stopped swimming.

“I am afraid we shall have to turn her around. Tommy will persist in opening her mouth. We mustn’t drown her,” said Harriet.

Jane righted their tow with a jerk.

“Those girls, those girls!” muttered Miss Elting, turning a laughing face to Janus Grubb.

“Well, I swum!” he answered, nodding. “Never saw such a bunch of girls. Are they always like they have been this time?”

“Always,” chuckled the guardian. “Usually more so.”

“Well, I swum!”

“Will you swim, or will you drown?” demanded Jane of Tommy.

“I’ll thwim, I’ll thwim,” answered Tommy chokingly. “I think you are horrid to treat me tho. I’ll be even with you.”

Jane started for her. Tommy got into instant action, and how she did swim! Harriet and Jane were much faster swimmers than was Tommy, but they pretended to have difficulty in keeping up with her and lagged behind until their shoulders were even with the kicking feet of the little, lisping girl. Then they began grabbing at her ankles, drawing fresh shouts and protests from Tommy. They teased her all the way to the shore, up which Tommy staggered and ran to Miss Elting for protection.

“Don’t make me all wet,” objected the guardian, leaping back out of the way.

Tommy sat down and whimpered. Jane and Harriet picked her up, placing her on a seat made of their four hands, and started up the mountainside with their burden.

“We aren’t afraid of getting wet, are we, Jane?” laughed Harriet.



“Not this morning, we are not, darlin’,” chuckled Jane. But they did not carry Tommy far. She decided that she would walk, fearing they were planning some trick on her. She had no desire to be dumped off on a steep place as Hazel had been. The girls clambered up the mountainside laughing over their mishaps of the morning, and ran bounding into camp far ahead of Miss Elting and the guide. They found Hazel very much excited over something that had occurred in the camp during their absence.

CHAPTER XVIII

FACED BY A FRESH MYSTERY

There were serious expressions on the faces of the Meadow-Brook Girls when Miss Elting and the guide came in. Miss Elting saw at once that something was amiss. She demanded to know what it was.

“Hazel saw something that frightened her,” answered Harriet.

“Saw something?” repeated the guardian, looking from one girl to the other.



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“Tell it,” urged Harriet, nodding to Hazel.

“I was watching for you and the girls when I thought I heard something behind me. I looked around but saw nothing unusual. But I had a feeling that some one was about. I walked to the other end of the camp and back. I saw no one—nothing, I hadn’t thought to look up. Something made me do so just then and I saw it.”

“Saw what?” demanded the guardian and the guide in chorus.

“A man.”

“You did?” exclaimed Janus. “Where?”

“He was behind those green bushes that you see up there—Oh, he has gone. No need to go up there now, Mr. Grubb.” Janus had begun to climb the rocks.

“Yes. Please wait and hear the rest of the story,” ordered Miss Elting, who was deeply interested, but apparently undisturbed. “What sort of looking man was he, Hazel?”

“He wore a long, black beard, and—”

“You are positive of this?” interrupted Miss Elting.

“Yes. I saw him plainly. That is, I saw his head and shoulders. The rest of his body was hidden behind the bushes. I was going to cry out, but I knew you couldn’t hear me. There was too much noise down there, so I just stood still.”

“Did he speak to you?” asked Janus.

“No. I spoke to him. I asked him what he wanted. He did not reply. Instead, he dodged behind the bushes and ran. I could see, from the movement of the bushes to the right there, that he was getting away very rapidly.”

“Did the man wear green goggles?” asked the guide.

“No, sir. He wore no glasses.”

“Of course not. We’ve got the green goggles,” broke in Jane. “But the whiskers! Our enemy wore whiskers, didn’t he?”

“What do you make of this, Mr. Grubb?” questioned Miss Elting, eyeing Janus sharply.

“Can’t make anything of it. Might be most anybody. A good many persons up in these parts wear whiskers.” Janus stroked his own reflectively. “And then again, a good



many more do not, so I don't see that his whiskers prove much. Wish I might have seen him. If you don't mind I'll go up there now and see what I can find."

Harriet said she would accompany him and assist in the search.

"You couldn't recognize in him the man we saw on the station platform at Compton the night of our arrival, could you, Hazel?" asked the guardian.

"Oh, no. I don't believe it was the same person at all."

"Then we are no wiser than before, except that it behooves us to keep our eyes open. If that man has followed us into the mountains we shall hear more of him. Do you find anything up there, Harriet?"

"We find where he has broken down some bushes, but that is all. No footprints. I might possibly pick up his trail, but over the rocks there would be slight chance of running it down."

"I couldn't permit it," was Miss Elting's decisive reply. "Come down. Jane, will you please start the fire? We will have breakfast."



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“Oh, yeth, we haven't had breakfatht yet,” piped Tommy.

“Nor have you dried your clothes. Every one of you except Hazel is wet to the skin.”

Jane had brought some dry sticks by the time the guide and Harriet returned. Janus got more, realizing the condition of his party, and wishing to build up a fire that would dry their wet clothing. The girls had no changes of clothing with them. They would be obliged to continue to wear their wet dresses until these had dried.

A hot fire proved a welcome relief. The girls gathered about it, turning frequently in order to give their clothing an opportunity to dry. It was not long before the steam rose from their rapidly drying garments. They laughed and joked over their condition. Miss Elting was more serious. She held a low-voiced conversation with Janus while he was getting the breakfast. Janus insisted that he had not the faintest idea that he had an enemy. At least he knew of no one who would commit the acts that had been committed since the party started out from Compton on their journey through the White Mountains.

The girls' wet clothing was almost dry when they were called to breakfast. This meal was late on this particular morning, for good and sufficient reason, but the girls did not complain about this. What they did complain of was their bedraggled condition. They laid their trouble on this occasion directly at the door of Tommy Thompson. Tommy was undisturbed. She expressed her pleasure, however, that her companions had also received a wetting, and uncharitably hoped they would fall in every time she did.

During breakfast they discussed their situation, finally deciding to push on as soon after the meal as possible. The guide said they would feel dry and warm soon after starting on their way. He thought they would be better off on the move than sitting about the fire. Hazel had now fully recovered from the effects of her fall. Harriet's side still gave her pain, but she, too, felt that the best thing for her would be plenty of exercise.

That forenoon she insisted on carrying Hazel's pack, and did more real work on the trail than any other girl of the party. They were above the timber line, though there was little timber below it, the side of the mountain having been fire-swept long before that. The only green to be seen immediately about them were the blue-berry bushes and similar mountain vegetation that flourished in the crevices of the rocks.

It was early in the afternoon when they emerged on the summit of the mountain and gazed off over its gray top, that, flanked by other domes of the Sandwich range, reminded one of the past ages and the fascinating legends of the Sokokis. The summit was rough and rugged, though devoid of big boulders such as are usually to be found in similar locations.

“You are now three thousand five hundred feet in the air,” announced the guide, rather proudly.



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"Ith that what maketh Buthter tho uppith thith afternoon?" questioned Tommy.

"It may be what makes you so light-headed," retorted Margery.

"There! Now, will you be good?" jeered Jane.

"Yeth. That wath a good one. Too bad you don't thay thomething bright every day. Think what a lot more fun we would have, Buthter."

An hour was spent strolling about the summit, looking off at the magnificent scenery which stretched on all sides of them.

A cup of coffee apiece was made and drunk, but fire-making material was so scarce that no attempt was made to cook a meal. About mid-afternoon the party was called to attention and directed to shoulder their packs preparatory to their long tramp down the mountain side to the Shelter, where fresh clothing and food awaited them. They left the summit with regret. Harriet said she would give a great deal to see a sunrise from there.

"Wait for Mt. Washington," answered Janus. "I shan't tell you anything about it, but, once you are there, you will be glad you decided to climb it."

Instead of climbing down over the rocks the party took what is known among mountaineers as a "tote trail," a narrow pathway generally used for packing stuff into the mountains on the backs of human beings. This "tote trail" was a winding trail full of twists and turns and surprises, now appearing to end at some high precipice, then creeping around the corner of a huge jutting rock, but ever dropping and dropping farther and farther away from the summit and nearer to the "Shelter," which was their destination on this occasion.

Twilight was upon them again before they reached the main tourist trail. It was now late in the season. Not a human being had they seen since starting out to climb Mt. Chocorua except for Hazel's discovery of the strange man whom she had caught spying on their camp at the "Slide." The memory of that face still lingered in mind, nor had the incident been forgotten by any member of the party. They wondered what the next surprise would be. They were destined to know within a very short time.

Walking was good by this time and the remaining distance to the "Shelter" was covered at a greater rate of speed. Janus swung to the right, then to the left, and behold, the little hut stood darkly before them!

"Here we are," called the guide cheerily, striding over and throwing open the door.



CHAPTER XIX

THE STORY THE LIGHT TOLD

“Strike a light, if you please,” requested the guardian, as Janus stood holding the door of the hut open for his charges to enter.

“You’ll have a light directly,” returned the guide, applying a lighted match to the hanging lamp with its smoke-dimmed chimney.

“Oh, isn’t it nice and cosy in here?” sighed Margery contentedly, dropping down on a bench. Unslinging her heavy pack, she let it fall to the floor.



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"What about supper?" was Janus's first question.

"Yeth, that ith what I thay," approved Tommy. "Buthter would thay tho, too, only thhe is afraid I'll teathe her about eating."

"Afraid of you!" exclaimed Margery disgustedly. "Well, I guess not."

During this passage at arms Janus was making an industrious hunt for a frying-pan. He opened one of the packs that had been left behind, thrust one hand inside, then paused, a look of astonishment on his honest face, underneath the frown that wrinkled his weather-beaten forehead. For a few seconds the bewildered guide stared stupidly at the object he had taken from the pack. The girls were busy undoing their tote-packs, so they failed to heed what he was doing until his peculiar attitude finally attracted their attention.

Janus thrust his hand in again, but the result was no less discouraging.

"Well, I swum!" he grumbled. "I swum!"

"So you've said before," smiled Hazel.

"Anything wrong?" asked the guardian, glancing up from her own pack, the contents of which were spread out on the floor before her.

The guide "swum" again. Miss Elting paused in her work, turning to him.

"Mr. Januth ith troubled," observed Tommy wisely.

"What is it?" demanded the guardian.

"What is it? It's a rock, Miss."

"What do you mean?"

For answer he held out on the palm of one hand a chunk of granite, the while surveying it ruefully. Miss Elting took and examined the rock, then directed a look of inquiry at Janus.

"I don't understand," she said, with a rising inflection on the last word.

"Well, I swum! no more do I!" he exploded. "Will you look into that pack and see what you find? Maybe I can't see straight this evening. Maybe I can't."

Harriet ran to the pack he had indicated and peered into it. She uttered an exclamation, loosened the rest of the binding ropes and turned the contents out on the floor of the



Shelter. Exclamations of amazement fell from the lips of the Meadow-Brook Girls. Instead of the supplies that had originally been stowed in the pack, a choice assortment of stones, chunks of granite, small hardheads and pebbles rolled out on the floor. They were speechless for the moment. Janus tugged nervously at his beard, too thoroughly astonished for speech.

“I gueth thomebody hath been throwing thtoneth at uth,” observed Tommy Thompson. “I wonder who liketh uth tho much that he wantth to knock our headth off?”

“Open the other packs,” directed Miss Elting calmly.

They did so, but with the same results. Each pack was filled with stones, and, in some instances, pieces of wood, parts of limbs of trees, dirt, shale and the like.

“Oh, my stars, what a mess!” cried Crazy Jane.

“Did you not say that our equipment was perfectly safe here?” demanded Miss Elting, turning sharply on the guide.



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"I—I thought it was, Miss."

"Then how do you explain this?" she asked with a comprehensive wave of the hand.

"I don't explain it. I swum! I don't know what to think about it. I wish I could get my hands on the scoundrel."

Miss Elting sat down to think. "It is plain that we have been followed into the mountains. The man whom Hazel saw at the 'Slide' undoubtedly is the one who has been causing us all the trouble. He may have been hovering about us all the time, we knowing nothing about it. I am afraid we aren't very clever, girls. We have allowed our enemy to outwit us."

"I don't believe he has, Miss Elting," replied Harriet. "If so, he has been watching us from a distance. We surely should have discovered if the man had come close to our camp."

"It must have been the man that Hazel saw, and I believe he was the one who dropped the green goggles," was Harriet's emphatic declaration. "I wonder what his grievance is?"

"All our stuff gone; we'll have to go back, won't we?" mourned Margery.

"We have our luggage, but that is some distance from here," replied the guardian. "How long will it take us to get to our supplies, Mr. Grubb?"

"A day, or a day and a half, I reckon."

"Then we had better go for them to-morrow morning. We can do nothing more this evening. But—what are we to do for food?"

"We have a little. We have some coffee and a spoonful of rice. That's enough. We can live another twenty-four hours or so on that. I'll fix up something now. Maybe there's something in a cache back of the hut. I'll see." To their delight, Janus returned, not long after that, with a small sack of flour and one of corn meal. It did not take the girls long to start a fire in the small cook stove. They threw open the windows, the "Shelter" warming up very quickly.

The girls began work at once, Janus showing them how to make the kind of corn cakes that are popular with the mountain guides in the White Mountain range. All the time Harriet Burrell was thinking intently over their situation and the loss of the supplies. She was considering the perplexing problems from different viewpoints, with a view toward solving them.

"What did the thief do with our supplies?" she demanded, turning to the guide.



“Probably took them away with him. That’s the way thieves usually do. Otherwise, what’s the use in stealing?”

“I don’t think so, sir. I do not believe this thief took the stuff because he wanted it, but rather to make you trouble.”

“Maybe, maybe. It’s all the same thing.”

“Oh, no, sir; it isn’t, not if he did not carry the stuff away with him. If he did not carry it away with him, what could he have done with it?” She regarded Mr. Grubb inquiringly.

“I swum! I don’t know,” declared Janus, looking deeply puzzled.



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“Nor do I, but I propose to find out. Is there such a thing as a lantern here, Mr. Grubb?”

He shook his head. “Better leave off everything else till we get some food. There’s the coffee pot on the steps outside, where I put it, but the cream is all gone. We’ll have to drink our coffee black.”

“Yeth, and thtay awake all night,” averred Tommy. “But we don’t care. We are used to thtaying awake all night, aren’t we, Jane?”

“Yes, darlin’, we are,” agreed Jane brightly. “But I’m wishing I might lay violent hands on the rogue who took our belongings. Where is that Mr. Sheriff for whom you sent to come and catch our friend of the green goggles and the black whiskers, Mr. Grubb?”

“He’ll be along in good time,” replied the guide, stroking his own whiskers while regarding with squinting eyes the progress of the supper under the deft fingers of the Meadow-Brook Girls. “Here! Let me do that. I reckon I can be finishing the supper while you young ladies get ready. There’s a barrel of rain water just back of the hut where you can wash. You look as though you needed it—no offense intended.”

A merry laugh greeted the words of Janus Grubb. The girls agreed that they *did* need it. Their clothing was not in very good condition, either, but nothing could be done with the garments until they reached a spot where they could change them for fresh apparel. The girls ran out laughing, and a moment later were heard splashing in the rain barrel. They came in with dripping faces to get their towels, then, running out again, rubbed their faces until their cheeks glowed underneath their tan. Tommy’s freckles were now more pronounced than ever, but her usually pale face wore a healthy look and her eyes were bright and sparkling.

Supper was late that evening, nor was it a heavy supper when at last they sat down on the benches in the “Shelter” with their cups and their corn cakes beside them, but they were as happy a party of girls as if sitting at a table laden with good things and sparkling with cut glass and silver. There were health and good-fellowship here; and there also was the pride of achievement, for these young girls had accomplished a great deal during the time they had been living their out-of-door life. They made merry over their scanty supper and finished with satisfied appetites.

After supper Harriet asked the guide to prepare some torches, saying she wished to look about to see if she could find anything. Janus said there was no wood at hand fit for torches. No wood, no lantern—nothing save the smoky old lamp in the “Shelter,” and very little oil in that. Janus said there had been a can of oil there a week before that, but that some one must have carried it off, can and all.

“I’ll hold the light for you if you want to dig,” he offered.



“Yes, please do that,” urged Harriet. “I know where I wish to look. If you will hold the light out there on the edge of that bank of rocks I will go below. It is such a convenient place to throw things. Tommy, look out that you don’t throw your dishes over when you go out. I think I will just wash that chimney before we go any further.”



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"Whatever you do don't drop it!" exclaimed Miss Elting. "We cannot get along without the lamp."

"We can build up a fire outside, if necessary. I rather think that would be a better idea still. What do you say, Mr. Grubb?"

Janus consulted his whiskers, then decided that the idea was an excellent one. He said he would go out and get some fuel for the fire, and did so. While he was thus engaged, Harriet cleaned the lamp chimney, Miss Elting hung canvas over the glassless windows and the other girls washed and put away the few dishes that had been used. A fine, large fire was started on the ledge of rock that extended out from the "Shelter" to a drop-off of some twenty feet. Harriet was very much interested in the fire that night. Then, after it was well started, she walked to the edge, and, with her back to the flames, peered down.

All at once she started to run down the path to the left. She called to Jane to come with her. They had to clamber over some rough ground in order to reach a point below the hut. The light from the fire made the shadows dance down there.

"I saw something glisten down here," explained Miss Burrell. "I am certain it was a tin can. Wouldn't it be fine were we to find our canned supplies down here, Jane?"

"Then it is fine, for here's the very thing you were looking for." The Irish girl stooped, then held up a tin can. Harriet uttered a little exclamation and reached for it. "But it's empty," chuckled Jane.

"Oh, fudge! Some one has thrown it over. Other picnic parties have been up here. Besides, this is not one of our cans. But that doesn't mean we shan't find any of our own. Look hard, Jane."

"I'm looking hard, so hard that my eyes ache," replied Jane dryly. An instant later she cried out, "Will you look at that?"

Harriet was at her side in a couple of seconds from the uttering of that cry. Then she, too, raised her voice in a shout that called her companions from the hut. Miss Elting came out carrying the lamp. Janus took it from her, and, standing on the very edge in the full light of the campfire, held the lamp above his head and peered down.

"What is it?" cried the guardian.

"We have found our canned stuff and a whole lot of our equipment," answered Harriet triumphantly.

"Hooee-e-e-e!" shouted the Meadow-Brook Girls in great glee.

“Wait! I’ll be down there to help you gather it up,” Janus called down to them.

“Get the packs, girls,” ordered Miss Elting.

Then there came an interruption that startled the girls into silence. Something sped through the air over their heads, uttering a strange, weird woo-woo-woo! It passed, followed by a distant report, the crack of a rifle. Then, all at once, the lamp that Janus Grubb was holding above his head crumbled into nothingness, the oil in the well of the lamp streaming down over the guide’s head and face.



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CHAPTER XX

SEEKING A DESPERATE REVENGE

"Lie down!" bellowed Janus.

"Down!" commanded Miss Elting, in the same moment.

Janus moved more quickly than they ever had seen him do before. They did not think him capable of such rapid action.

"Look out below!" he roared, as, with a series of rapid kicks, he sent the burning sticks of the campfire tumbling over the edge into the little ravine below the "Shelter."

"Get out of the light! Come up here as fast as ye can! Into the hut with ye, every one!" Janus sprang from the rock and ran down the path toward Harriet and Jane.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Jane, who did not understand.

"I don't know," answered Harriet, herself a little startled. "I heard a gun fired twice. Can it be that some one is shooting at us? Oh, I hope not. But we must get out of here! Mr. Grubb, is that you?" she called, hearing some one floundering toward them.

"It's Grubb. Get out of that."

"What has happened?" begged Harriet, hurrying to meet the guide, who came on a run to where they stood.

"Enough! Did you hear the shots?"

"Yes."

"Well, one of them snipped the lamp. I'm greased from head to foot. The scoundrel!"

"But—but perhaps they were not intended for you, Mr. Grubb," suggested Jane breathlessly.

"They were intended for me, all right. No mistake about that, young ladies. Now, I want you to get into that shack on the double quick. I haven't a rifle, but I have a revolver that's good enough to take care of anything that gets close enough. Don't make too much noise; there might be another shot."

"I think not, if we do not start any more fires. I have an idea that the shots were intended for you, Mr. Grubb, not for us. If so, the man will not shoot again in the dark, fearing to hit one of us."



“Well, I swum!” grunted the guide.

Harriet’s guess seemed very plausible. He led them quickly up the path, and, reaching the top, hurried them into the cabin. Janus got his revolver, and, after loading it, slipped some extra cartridges into a pocket. “I don’t want anybody to come out again to-night,” he ordered. “You go to sleep, when you get ready, and I’ll sit outside to watch for the rascal in case he comes prowling around later.”

“Spread your blankets on the floor and sit down,” directed Miss Elting. “I don’t think we are quite ready for bed yet. We do not know but there may be more shots, though we aren’t going to be afraid, are we, girls?”

“No, we are not, Miss Elting. Why should we be? Being afraid doesn’t help us one little bit.”

So the girls seated themselves on their blankets, and in low tones talked over the series of mysterious occurrences that had marred an otherwise happy journey to the mountains. They wondered what wrong their enemy might feel had been done him to make him thus vengeful. The girls did quite believe that the man of the green goggles, Miss Elting’s caller, was either directly or indirectly concerned in the various mysteries, but that was as far as they could go toward a solution.



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One by one the campers rolled up in their blankets and went to sleep. Janus held his position in front of the "Shelter" throughout the night, but nothing occurred to disturb the camp until nearly three o'clock in the morning. Then two quick shots, fired seemingly right over their heads, brought the Meadow-Brook Girls out of their sound sleep, uttering little exclamations of alarm. Harriet sprang out through the open door without an instant's hesitation.

"Where is he? What did you shoot at?" she questioned apprehensively, fixing searching eyes upon the guide.

Miss Elting repeated the questions a few seconds later, she having joined Harriet.

The guide stood with revolver still pointed toward the tote-trail, ready to shoot at the slightest movement. In the faint light the two women could see a shadowy something that appeared to be standing beside the trail.

"There! See him? I swum, I don't understand it," muttered the guide. "I fired in the air to scare him."

"Where is it? What do you mean?" questioned the guardian.

"Him! I looked and he wasn't there, then I looked again and there he stood, right where you see him now. Then I shot into the air twice."

Harriet Burrell burst into a merry shout. She laughed and laughed until her companions, taking fresh courage, ran out, demanding to know what was so funny. Tommy declared that she would give almost anything to be able to laugh that way at that particular moment. Neither did Miss Elting understand the meaning of this sudden merriment, but she knew that Harriet had discovered something.

Janus regarded the girl frowningly, all the time keeping one eye on the faintly outlined figure out by the tote-trail.

"Laugh, consarn it!" Mr. Grubb growled, beginning to feel that, in some way, he had made a shining mark of himself, rather than appearing in the role of a hero who had valiantly defended his party of young women.

"What is it, dear?" asked the guardian.

"Don't you know what that is?" queried Harriet.

"No. It looks to me like a man leaning against something," answered Miss Elting.



“Yes, yes,” interposed the guide. “When I first shot at it it was standing straight up, then it tilted over against the rocks, and there it is. You get back. I’ll go over. If he shoots, you won’t be in any danger.”

“Oh, nonsense!” exploded Harriet. “Put your pistol down. Don’t you dare to point it toward me. I’ll lay your intruder.”

The girl ran forward, unheeding the warning cries of her companions. She ran straight to the object that, in the uncertain light, so closely resembled a human figure. The girls were begging Harriet to come back. Instead she boldly grasped the object with both hands, and threw it across the trail. A chorus of “Ohs!” greeted this performance. Janus lowered his weapon, his under jaw dropped. He followed Miss Elting, while the girls followed them both at a safe distance, Tommy and Margery ready to take flight at the slightest indication of danger.



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“Here he is, Mr. Grubb,” cried Harriet.

“Harriet, what is it?” demanded Miss Elting.

“Just a plain, rotting old tree trunk,” returned the girl.

“But—but it wasn’t there before,” stammered the guide.

Again Harriet laughed. Her companions gazed at her admiringly. None, unless it were Jane McCarthy, would have had the courage to go out there as Harriet Burrell had done. They told her so, too, at which Harriet laughed again.

“Let me tell you something,” said Harriet. “I’m not a bit braver than you are. As it happened, I knew what that was the instant I saw it. The tree trunk was not standing there when we came into camp last night. Had it been, Mr. Grubb would have seen it. The trunk had fallen across the trail. When I started to go down below to look for our supplies I stumbled over the stick, and to prevent some one else tripping over it, I threw it out of the trail. The stick ended over and stood upright against the rock where you saw it. I presume Mr. Grubb did see it tip to one side. I know, however, that the stick has been there ever since I tossed it out of the trail last night.”

“Well, I swum!” muttered Janus sheepishly, “I’m so easy it’s a wonder I haven’t lost myself.”

“No, you were doing your best to protect us,” replied Miss Elting. “But I would rather you did not shoot again except in real defence. In other words, don’t shoot unless some one shoots at you.”

“What am I going to do?” demanded the guide rather crossly. “Sit down and allow some outlaw to rob us at every turn?”

“We know you are ready to defend us,” pacified Miss Elting. “What would you advise us to do?”

“Make no further move until morning. When daylight comes we will get up the stuff that has been thrown over there, make up our packs and start for Mt. Washington,” returned Janus promptly. “I’ll reach a telephone before long and send word to the sheriff about what has occurred. He may be out already on the bridge matter, but he ought to know about this last affair. It will give him a clue as to where the man is.”

“But the unknown wretch may follow us,” protested the guardian.

“He won’t. He’s gone into hiding after what has happened. You won’t see any more of him. You see, he knows we shall be on the lookout for him, and he won’t be taking any chances on it until a day has passed—perhaps about to-morrow night—then he may

come back here to see what he can find. I am banking on that, after having thought the matter over. We won't be here, but the sheriff will, if I can get hold of him."



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Miss Elting agreed that the guide's plan was as good as could be devised, and promptly directed the girls to return to the hut and, if possible, sleep for the few remaining hours of the night. That morning the girls overslept. By the time they awakened, Janus had gathered together all the supplies and equipment to be found below the hut. Some of the provisions were missing. Nothing that would be likely to be recognized by the owners had been taken by the man who had thrown their stores overboard, so to speak, so they found themselves better off than they had hoped. A real breakfast was eaten that morning, after which packs were lashed and the party lost no time in starting to leave the mountain that had furnished them with so much excitement.

The journey down the trail was not a long one. After reaching the foot of the mountain they were obliged to travel nearly ten miles before reaching a village from whence they would go on by wagon until reaching the point whence they were to be conveyed to Mt. Washington.

That night found them weary and sleepy, but to stay at a hotel which boasted of all modern conveniences was a welcome change to the mountain climbers, who were both footsore and weary. It seemed but a few moments after retiring before they were called to get ready for breakfast and the long ride to the foot of the mountain, up which they were to climb. Their experience on Mt. Washington was to be both novel and exciting.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ASCENT OF MT. WASHINGTON

The supper smoke rose lazily in the still air. Below them lay a vast panorama of valley and now flattened hills. The Meadow-Brook Girls, after a day of hard climbing, were about half way to the summit of Mt. Washington. They had chosen the most difficult climbing to be found in the White Mountain Range. Janus had promised them some real mountain climbing when they reached Mt. Washington, and he had made good his word. They admitted that laughingly upon reaching the spot he had chosen for their night's camping, and willingly permitted the guide to start the fire while they rested preparatory to getting the supper.

"At least we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have left our friend of the green goggles behind," said Miss Elting, with a sigh of relief. "I hope we have seen the last of him. He certainly tried to spoil our trip."

"Sheriff's out on the trail," answered Janus. "There's trouble of some sort down there. Sheriff's office said things were popping, but wouldn't talk much because he—the fellow I got on the telephone—didn't know me. Funny not to know me, wasn't it?"

"Yeth," answered Tommy.



“What did you conclude from what was said?” asked Miss Elting.

“That they were after some one and knew who it was. I hope they get him. I hope that, when they do, they give Janus Grubb a chance to tell the fellow what he thinks of him.”



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"It may not be the man we think at all," suggested the guardian.

"No-o-o-o," drawled the guide reflectively.

"If not, what do you propose to do?" questioned Harriet.

"Why, keep on, of course," answered the guide, in a tone of mild surprise. "To-morrow we reach the top of Mount Washington; then we go down the other side, and so on till we get through."

"All of which isn't getting our supper," Harriet reminded him laughingly. "Jane, will you please shave some of the smoked beef? And don't spoil your appetite by nibbling, please."

"Why, darlin', I never did such a thing. It was the beef that flew right into my mouth. Now, what could poor Jane do under such circumstances, except to swallow hard?"

"Nothing but thubmit gratefully and thwallow the beef," commented Tommy.

"And I did just that," grinned Jane.

Their table was a rocky shelf elevated about ten inches above the ground and standing on a sort of standard, so that the girls were able, by sitting down beside it, to tuck their feet under the rock, which made an excellent board for the purpose. The night had not yet fallen, but shadows hung over the valleys and the distant mountains, the purple tinge creeping slowly up the side of the mountain which they were climbing, enveloping the campers before they had finished eating their supper.

The evening, on the side of the mountain in their comfortable camp, was a delightful one. They sat on their blankets beside a blazing campfire amid the great silence, broken only by the voices of the campers and the occasional cry of a night bird. Janus, after having made a thorough patrol of the ground surrounding the camp, returned to the campfire and entertained the girls by telling of the early Indian days, stories that had been handed down by generations, and that had grown and grown until they had assumed startling proportions.

All at once Harriet, in the midst of one of these remarkable tales, tilted her head back, her eyes apparently studying the stars that hung over the mountain range to the south of them. She gazed thoughtfully. After a few seconds of this, she shifted the position of her head, supporting the latter with her clasped hands. After remaining in this position for several minutes the girl got up, yawned and began walking slowly back and forth, the while listening to the guide's story.

"Harriet, are you nervous or tired?" questioned the guardian, eyeing her shrewdly.



“I believe it must be nerves,” answered Harriet laughingly. She strolled off into the shadows, there to sit down on a rock within easy sound of the voices of her companions, who soon forgot that she was not among them. After making sure that she was safe in doing so, she slid slowly from the rock, and walking on all fours ran away into the bushes and out of sight. It was a most unusual thing to do. Had Crazy Jane been guilty of such an act, nothing would have been thought of it, but had Harriet Burrell’s companions observed her they would have opened their eyes in amazement. Fortunately, they were too fully occupied with Janus Grubb’s story.



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Harriet sat down on the ground, after having moved away some two hundred yards from the camp.

"I hope they don't miss me," she thought. "I hope, too, that I haven't been seen. Now I will try to see something for myself." The girl sat perfectly still, with ears more than eyes on the alert.

Harriet had not been in her position very long before her ears caught a faint sound directly ahead of her. Still she did not move, except to raise her head a little. A bird hopped into a bush close at hand without discovering her presence. The faint noise ahead grew more pronounced, the whip of a bush as it was released by the hand that had pushed it away was heard and understood. Harriet Burrell was woodsman enough to recognize all such sounds instantly upon hearing them.

She crouched low, fearing that the intruder might approach close enough to discover her. Every faculty was on the alert. Who or what the unseen intruder might be, of course, Harriet did not know. It might be a mountaineer who, seeking camp for the night, was first doing a little investigating to satisfy himself that he would be welcome. Then, again, it might be a different sort of visitor.

Harriet's attention was distracted by a burst of laughter from the camp of the Meadow-Brook Girls. Then there followed a long-drawn "Hoo-e-e-e!" that she knew was meant for her.

"Harri—et!" It was Margery who was calling. Harriet groaned under her breath. Were her companions to persist, were they to get an idea that she had strayed from the camp, her quest would come to a sudden end, for the guide and his charges would soon be piling over the rocks, searching and shouting for her.

It was Miss Elting, however, who, quick to understand, quieted Margery Brown.

"Harriet will return presently," said the guardian. "Please go on with your story, Mr. Grubb."

Janus continued. The next moment Harriet Burrell was forgotten by her companions once more, for which forgetfulness the girl out there in the bushes was duly thankful. The movement in the bushes, which had abruptly ceased, following the call, had not been resumed. This worried her somewhat. If the person out there were in the least a woodsman, he would know that some one of the party was out of the camp and would be on his guard. This might defeat the plan she had in mind. But there was only one thing to do, that was to remain in her present hiding place, keeping prudent silence and awaiting results. This was what Harriet did.

She crouched there fully fifteen minutes after the interruption from the camp before the presence of another person was again revealed. A sound so close that Harriet barely repressed an exclamation of surprise caught her ears. The girl for a few seconds held her breath. She could hear the beating of her heart so plainly that she feared that the other person might hear it as well.



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There followed another period of silence, but much more brief than the previous one. It was then that Harriet Burrell was able to distinguish the figure of a man—that is, his head and shoulders. The night was too dark to enable her to do more than decide upon what it was.

Now he began creeping cautiously toward the camp, going only a few paces at a time, then halting to listen. Harriet moved with him, though not so fast. She was stepping directly toward the camp, which lay directly ahead of her, whereas the man was following a different course with the same destination in view. When he moved, Harriet moved; when he halted, she did so. Halting a second too late would undoubtedly reveal her presence, hence the girl exercised unusual caution, making little more disturbance than a cat stalking its prey. Once she sank down noiselessly when, by a movement of the head and shoulders, she discovered that the man was turning to look behind him.

“If he gets within sight of the camp he will see that one of the party is missing, if he knows how many of us there are,” reasoned the young woman shrewdly. “I must be on my guard when he discovers that, or something may happen.” Harriet might have called out to warn her companions, but that was not a part of her plan as yet.

About seventy-five yards had been traversed in this manner when a sudden change came over the scene, for, between Harriet Burrell and the intruder whom she was stalking, the camp of the Meadow-Brook Girls was soon to be thrown into wild turmoil and the young woman’s utmost expectations were to be more than realized.

CHAPTER XXII

A ROUT AND A CAPTURE

The intruder had halted. Harriet knew that from his position he could see the camp. From her position it was not visible. She saw the man halt, peer, then suddenly straighten up and glance about him apprehensively. Being now between her and the light shed by the campfire, the girl was able to observe his movements quite clearly.

“He suspects something,” quivered Harriet. But being at a loss as to what to do next the girl dropped swiftly to the ground, rising almost the next second. She was leaning well forward, peering at the figure with all the concentration she could bring to bear. The intruder had by this time again directed his attention to the camp. There was now in the man’s hands something that he seemed to be leveling over the tops of the bushes amid which he was standing.

Harriet Burrell drew her right hand cautiously above her shoulder. That hand held a stone. Suddenly the stone cut through the bushes about a foot to the right of the intruder’s shoulder. He jumped, but before he could decide upon what his next move

should be a second and larger stone smote him between the shoulders. Then followed a perfect rain of stones. Some hit him, others did not.



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There was but one way by which the man could get away without turning back and facing this unseen peril. That way was almost straight toward the camp. He hesitated. A large stone grazed his cheek. The fellow leaped through the bushes. Something was swept from his hands by the bushes and fell to the rocks with a clatter. The girls in camp heard the sound.

“Harriet, what are you doing?” called Jane.

“Look out!” shouted Harriet. She started in pursuit of the fleeing man, sending a shower of missiles after him. Some of the stones dropped to the rocks back of the camp, rolling into the camp itself.

Then, to the amazement of the Meadow-Brook party, a man darted across a corner of the lighted space, which he cleared in half a dozen leaps and bounds, Harriet still hurling stones after him and shouting her warnings to her companions.

The girls fled from the campfire, crying out in alarm. Janus, for the instant, was overcome with surprise, but he pulled himself together sharply, running to his pack and snatching up his revolver.

“It’s our man!” cried Harriet. “I made him run.”

“Thave me!” wailed Tommy, throwing herself flat on her face behind a rock.

Janus had clattered down the rocks after the intruder. The guide’s revolver began to speak. He was firing wildly, not being able to see the man, who either had got safely away, or else was in hiding behind one of the many rocks and projections. It did not seem as if he could have run down the mountainside at the rate he was going without falling and breaking his neck. The guide fired his revolver into every dark recess that he thought might afford a hiding place for the fugitive. Then he loaded up and emptied his revolver a second time.

By this time the camp was almost in a state of panic. Miss Elting spoke sharply to the girls, commanding them to stop their shouting and to come back.

“Mr. Grubb, if you keep on shooting you will have no ammunition left,” the guardian warned him. “Besides, I would rather you wouldn’t shoot any more. We don’t know that this man is the one we suspect.”

Janus broke his smoking revolver and ejected the exploded shells, after which he recharged the cylinder and put the weapon back in his pocket. He returned to the campfire, holding his hat in one hand, with the other hand brushing the perspiration from his forehead.

“Well, I swum!” he muttered. “I swum!”



“Harriet, we will hear your explanation. Why didn’t you tell Mr. Grubb in time, so he could look after this fellow?” demanded Miss Elting. “You knew there was some one about some time before you got up and walked away, didn’t you?”

“I thought I heard some one. That was the reason I strolled off by myself.”

“So I supposed,” commented the guardian.

“Had I said anything the person would have cried out and given the alarm. I wanted to satisfy myself that I was right, and I was.”



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"I should say you were!"

"Yeth, and he had black whithkerth, too," interjected Tommy.

"He wore a soft hat pulled down over his face," added Margery.

"I believe it is the same man," said the guardian reflectively.

"Get back out of the light, ladies, please," urged the guide. "We will let the fire burn, but we had better keep out of the light. The man may have a gun."

"No, he has not," spoke up Harriet.

"What was he doing out there?" questioned Miss Elting.

"Spying on the camp, then getting ready to shoot. I think he was going to shoot Mr. Grubb," was the startling declaration. Janus gripped his whiskers with all the fingers of the right hand. He gave the whiskers a tug that threatened to thin them out.

"Shoot me?" he roared.

Harriet nodded and smiled.

"But I thought you said he had no gun," objected Miss Elting.

"He hasn't now. I have his gun," answered Harriet with a twinkle in her eyes. "Yes, it is a rifle. I am glad we have it, for, from the present outlook, we shall need it." She stepped away and from a rock picked up a repeating rifle. This the intruder had dropped. Harriet had picked up the weapon and taken it to camp, laying it down to continue her stone-throwing. She had forgotten all about the gun until the excitement had subsided somewhat, and Miss Elting and the guide had begun questioning her. Janus took the rifle, turning it over in his hands, examining it with critical eyes.

"Modern gun, thirty-eight calibre, repeating," he muttered. "Well, I swum!"

"Do you recognize it?" asked the guardian.

Janus shook his head. "Of course, you will keep it for the present."

"Until the owner calls for it, Miss," replied Janus grimly, whereat there was a giggle from Margery.

"Tell us how you discovered the man. Let us have the whole story," urged Miss Elting. Harriet related briefly how she had discovered the stranger and all that followed until she had driven him into the camp, as she had hoped to be able to do, believing that



Janus would be able to capture the man. Had Janus been a more active man and quicker of wit, he undoubtedly would have been able to catch the fellow; however, by the time the guide had collected himself, the intruder had disappeared.

Miss Elting was vexed at Janus's inactivity, but it would do no good to say so. Janus had done the best he could and had wasted more than a dozen bullets among the rocks of Mt. Washington. They had the stranger's gun, therefore she was reasonably certain that their enemy could do them no further harm that night. Still, it was thought best to have Mr. Grubb remain on watch for the rest of the night. Harriet offered to do this, but the guide would not listen to such a proposition, nor would Miss Elting. While they were discussing the incident he kept his eyes on Harriet almost continuously. Wonder and admiration were plainly to be seen in their expression.



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Some time elapsed before the camp of the Meadow-Brook Girls settled down. They felt even more secure, knowing that Harriet had captured the intruder's rifle. It was not believed that the man possessed another, so there was little danger of further shooting that night. At the suggestion of the guide, and the further orders of their guardian, the girls rolled in their blankets and soon were asleep. They were awakened, shortly after twelve, by a shout from the guide. Then followed a volley of quick shots and a warning cry from Janus Grubb.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

"Quick, girls!" shouted Miss Elting.

"Thave me!" screamed Tommy Thompson.

Harriet opened her eyes in time to see Janus running rapidly from the camp, firing his revolver at every jump. After his second shout of warning he was not heard to speak again. For a moment or so they could hear him crashing through the hushes, now and then firing his revolver, probably when he caught sight of the man he was pursuing, the intruder having no doubt returned, perhaps hoping to be able to catch the camp asleep, thus giving him an opportunity to recover his rifle.

The girls unrolled themselves from their blankets as quickly as possible. Harriet started to follow Janus.

"Come back!" commanded Miss Elting.

Harriet halted abruptly. "Please let me go," she pleaded.

"By no means! How could you ask such a thing? Let Janus attend to matters of this sort. We must look after ourselves here. The man may return."

Harriet Burrell still stood where she had halted. Her head was bent slightly forward. She was listening. Not a sound could be heard now from the pursuing guide.

"Hoo-e-e-e-e!" called Harriet. But no answering call came back to her. She still kept her position until the guardian called to her. Harriet then walked slowly back to her trembling companions. Jane and Miss Elting were no more frightened than Harriet. They did not know, however, what had occurred to disturb Janus, and could only surmise. Harriet stirred the fire, throwing on more dry boughs and brush until a crackling blaze had sprung up. She was more disturbed than her expression indicated. In the meantime Miss Elting had satisfied herself that nothing had been taken from the camp, which knowledge served in a way to relieve her.



However, as the moments passed, and nothing further was heard from the guide, the others of the Meadow-Brook party began to feel a vague alarm. They could not believe that anything had happened to Janus, nor could they understand why he should remain away from the camp so long. Jane and Harriet “Hoo-e-e-ed!” until they were hoarse, but no reply followed their calls. Half an hour passed; then an hour, during which time everybody walked nervously about the camp.



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“Miss Elting, something serious must have occurred to Mr. Grubb,” declared Harriet.

“Oh, goodness, more mystery!” exclaimed Jane.

“Please, let Jane and myself go out to look for him. He may have been shot, he may be suffering, or——”

“No! Not a girl may leave this camp,” replied the guardian firmly.

“But what if Mr. Grubb is in trouble?” protested Harriet.

“Would it better the situation were any of you girls to get into the same difficulty? No, I could not think of it. Besides, I believe Mr. Grubb will return in good time. We do not know but he may be hiding, hoping to catch the one he went out after. If so, you would be interfering with, perhaps defeating, the very plan he has in mind. No, girls; you will stay here.”

There was no more to be said. Miss Elting’s word was law with her charges. Harriet and Jane submitted without further protest, but this did not lessen their concern over the continued absence of the guide. Of course, there was no more sleep in the camp that night. The party sat down, always keeping out of the firelight, Harriet and Jane doing guard duty, walking about the camp some little distance back. Harriet had the rifle. The possession of this gave them a feeling of greater security than otherwise would have been the case. She kept the rifle in her hands during all the rest of the night.

Dawn found the girls pale after their long vigil following the exciting incidents of the evening. But daylight served to bring back their failing courage. Harriet put down the rifle at the first suggestion of morning light. Jane gathered fresh fuel for the fire and a roaring blaze warmed them up, for the morning on the mountain was very chill.

“Come, girls, get breakfast,” directed Miss Elting. “We must eat. Afterward we shall consider what is to be done. The situation demands careful thought, then action. We cannot go far without our guide.”

They knew that. Breakfast was prepared in some haste that morning. While eating they discussed their predicament, finally coming to a decision. It was decided that they should try to follow the guide’s trail, spreading out so as to cover the ground thoroughly. In this formation they would continue until they either found him or failed. There seemed no other course to take. The guide’s pack was distributed among the girls. It made quite a load for them, but Harriet and Jane carried more than the others, in addition to which Harriet carried the captured rifle. An examination of the magazine showed that there were ten cartridges in it, quite sufficient for any likely needs of theirs.

Before starting out Harriet raised the rifle with the muzzle pointing skyward.



“Don’t be frightened, I’m going to fire a signal,” she announced. Margery screamed, despite the warning, when a crash woke the echoes. After an interval of a few seconds Harriet fired two more shots in quick succession. This was a signal. All listened, but no answering shot was heard, nor any shout to indicate that the signal had been heard.

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“We will move on,” announced the guardian. “Keep within calling distance. Harriet will take the trail from the camp; the others will spread out on either side.”

Harriet Burrell started a little in advance of the others, beginning at the point where she had seen Janus disappear. For a time it was somewhat difficult to follow the trail, because of the trampling the bushes had had on the evening before. However, after a short time the trail stretched away, clear to the eyes of an experienced woodsman. There were broken bushes here and there; that was all, though enough for one who knew how to use her eyes.

“I have found the trail,” called Harriet; “it is turning to the east.” This she knew was to enable the pursued to make better time in getting away. After a short distance the trail turned upward, then led to the east again. Bushes were getting more scarce. Only occasional clumps of them were to be found, making the work of following the trail much more difficult.

Two hours of climbing, with frequent periods of hunting for the trail that had lost itself, brought them to the end of their resources. The trail, at first so plainly marked, had, as a famous woodsman has said, “petered out into a squirrel track, run up a tree and disappeared into a knothole.” On every side were almost barren rocks, though below and further to the east the mountain vegetation showed thick and green, dropping away into ravines here and there, the surface being more uneven than anything they had yet encountered on this particular mountain. Still further below, the mountainside appeared to be quite heavily wooded.

“I believe we should look into that,” said Harriet, indicating the lower part that was covered with green. “We may find some clue to the whereabouts of our guide.”

“We might get lost there,” answered the guardian.

“But—we have only to go down. We can’t possibly get lost if we do that. Going down will lead us to the foot of the mountain, and out into the open once more,” urged Harriet. The guardian smiled.

“How silly of me not to have thought of that. I am beginning to think that my pupil knows more about outdoor life and woodcraft than I ever dreamed. If you think best, Harriet, we will look down there. In the meantime I would suggest that one of us remain in this vicinity to make a more thorough search.”

Harriet offered to do this, so it was agreed that the rest of the party should head obliquely down the mountain while she worked back and forth, like a switchback railway, until she, too, had reached the objective point where the others would be waiting for her. This programme was carried out, beginning immediately. Not a trace, however, did she find of the lost trail. While awaiting her arrival the others of the party walked back

and forth along the edge of the thick growth, but with no better results than had attended the search made by Harriet Burrell.



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At noon they stopped for luncheon, then followed the same method as had Harriet, moving east and west, ever enlarging their field as the growth increased in area. Night found them far up on the mountainside still facing the mystery of the disappearance of the guide, whom the girls earlier had named "The Pilot of the White Mountains."

He was no longer a pilot, but in need of one.

It was not a particularly cheerful party of girls that sat down to a supper of rice, corn cakes and coffee that evening. It was arranged that Harriet should take the early part of the night watch, Jane McCarthy the last half, for they dared not leave their camp unguarded. A huge fire was built that sent a glow high above the foliage of bushes and second-growth trees, visible for a long distance. This was done with a purpose. The girls hoped that, were Janus within sight, he might see the light and be guided to them. The blaze did serve to attract the attention of others whom the girls were to see before the night was ended.

Harriet's vigil was not a lonely one to her. She always found comfort in Nature, no matter how dark or silent Dame Nature's mood might be. She drew back a short distance from camp so that her moving about might not disturb her companions, remaining quiet until they had finally gone to sleep, after which she began strolling back and forth.

She had been on guard for something more than two hours when she was startled by three shots from somewhere lower down the mountain. Harriet pointed her rifle into the air and promptly pulled the trigger twice. Two heavy reports from her rifle caused an instant commotion in the camp of the Meadow-Brook Girls. The girls untangled themselves from their blankets and sprang up very much frightened. Their nerves were on edge after all they had experienced, and these shots, fired so near at hand, had sent at least three of them to the verge of panic.

"Are we attacked?" cried Jane.

"We may be," answered Harriet. "Hurry and get yourselves together. Some one besides ourselves is in the mountains and we must be ready for whatever comes. I don't know what it is. Hurry, please! We may have to leave here very suddenly."

No time was lost in "getting themselves together," as Harriet had expressed it. Fortunately, having gone to bed with their clothing on, there was little preparation to make. This completed, at Miss Elting's direction the girls moved off in a body, secreting themselves in the shadows some distance from the light of the campfire, but within sight of it. Up to this time Harriet had made no explanation. Miss Elting, after having placed the girls to her satisfaction, eagerly demanded to know the meaning of Harriet's signals, the guardian not having heard the other shots fired farther, down the mountainside.

“I answered a signal,” replied Miss Burrell.

“Oh, then it is the guide? It’s Janus!” cried Miss Elting joyously.



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"No, it was not Janus. The signal was fired from a rifle," answered Harriet Burrell.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

"There goes another shot!" exclaimed Harriet.

"Answer it, dear."

"There are only five more shells in the gun. Shall I use them all?"

"Shoot once."

Harriet did so, getting two signal shots in return.

"That means the strangers have heard and understood, does it not?" questioned the guardian.

"I think so. Now, I would suggest that we keep very quiet until we see who it is. We don't know but it may be our old enemy, who is taking this method of locating us. I have four more cartridges in the magazine. I think we should be able to hold the strangers off with those if we have to."

"Do not fire a shot unless I tell you to!" commanded Miss Elting firmly.

Harriet agreed with a nod, while the guardian stepped back to warn the other girls to be absolutely silent, no matter what might happen.

Harriet, acting upon a sudden thought ran over to the fire and scattered it with a stick so that it would not blaze up so high. Then she returned to her post. Some time had elapsed before she was startled, all at once, by the sound of a stick snapping.

The girl crept to a more favorable position, where she could obtain a better view of the camp. Then her heart fairly leaped into her throat. Standing plainly outlined in the flickering light of the campfire was a man. Harriet studied the man, then slowly slid the barrel of the rifle into position.

"Stand still! Don't move!" she cried. "I have you covered. If you move I'll shoot! Hands up!"

The man started, opened his mouth as if he were about to speak, then quickly raised his hands above his head. There was a half grin of amusement on the face of the visitor,



but Harriet, as she crouched squinting over the barrel of the captured rifle, failed to notice it. The light was faint and the man's hat shaded his face.

"Who are you and what do you want here?" she demanded, a trace of excitement in her tone.

"It's all right, Miss," the man smiled, tilting back his hat and revealing an open countenance. "I'm the sheriff of the county. I've been sent to look you up. We have your guide down at the foot of the White Trail. He's been hurt. We've got another fellow in whom you'll be interested too. Janus Grubb sent us to find you."

"Is Mr. Grubb badly hurt?" queried Harriet, as all the girls came slowly out from their hiding places.

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“Sprained an ankle, not much, but it will lay him up for a few days. The other man we have is Charlie Valdes, known as Big Charlie. The story of Valdes dates back to the time when Jan was a deputy sheriff. He ran down Charlie and another bad character, Henry Tracy. Both fellows were poachers, preying on the preserves of rich men in these mountains. Jan got his hands on the pair and gathered the evidence that put them in prison. Charlie’s time was up first, and he came back on purpose to even the score with Jan. The instant I had a description of the fellow who bothered you in Compton I felt sure it was Big Charlie. He’s the man who has been following you, and we’ll prove the burning of the bridge against him, too.”

“Did Mr. Grubb catch the man again this time, too?” asked Hazel.

“Jan overhauled Valdes, and in the fight that followed put a bullet in his leg,” replied the sheriff. “It was in the tussle that Jan got his ankle sprained, but your guide landed his man. Sometimes Jan may seem slow, but in a rumpus he’s a terror for speed, decision, and grit. We were heading up the White Trail, hoping to head you off, when we ran into Jan and Valdes.”

Later, at the county seat the Meadow-Brook Girls were permitted to put their evidence against Big Charlie, whom they recognized and identified. Charlie was held for trial, and afterward sent back to prison for a much longer term than his first one.

The Meadow-Brook Girls regretted parting with Janus Grubb, whom they held in the highest esteem. But Janus was not able to guide any one for the next fortnight or longer, so he recommended a new guide, who led the Meadow-Brook Girls on a long mountain “hike” over beaten trails. Then, at last, Harriet Burrell and her friends reluctantly turned homeward.

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