

# A MYSTERIOUS INHERITANCE



By  
BESSIE  
MARCHANT

Lawn Errett

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A Mysterious Inheritance

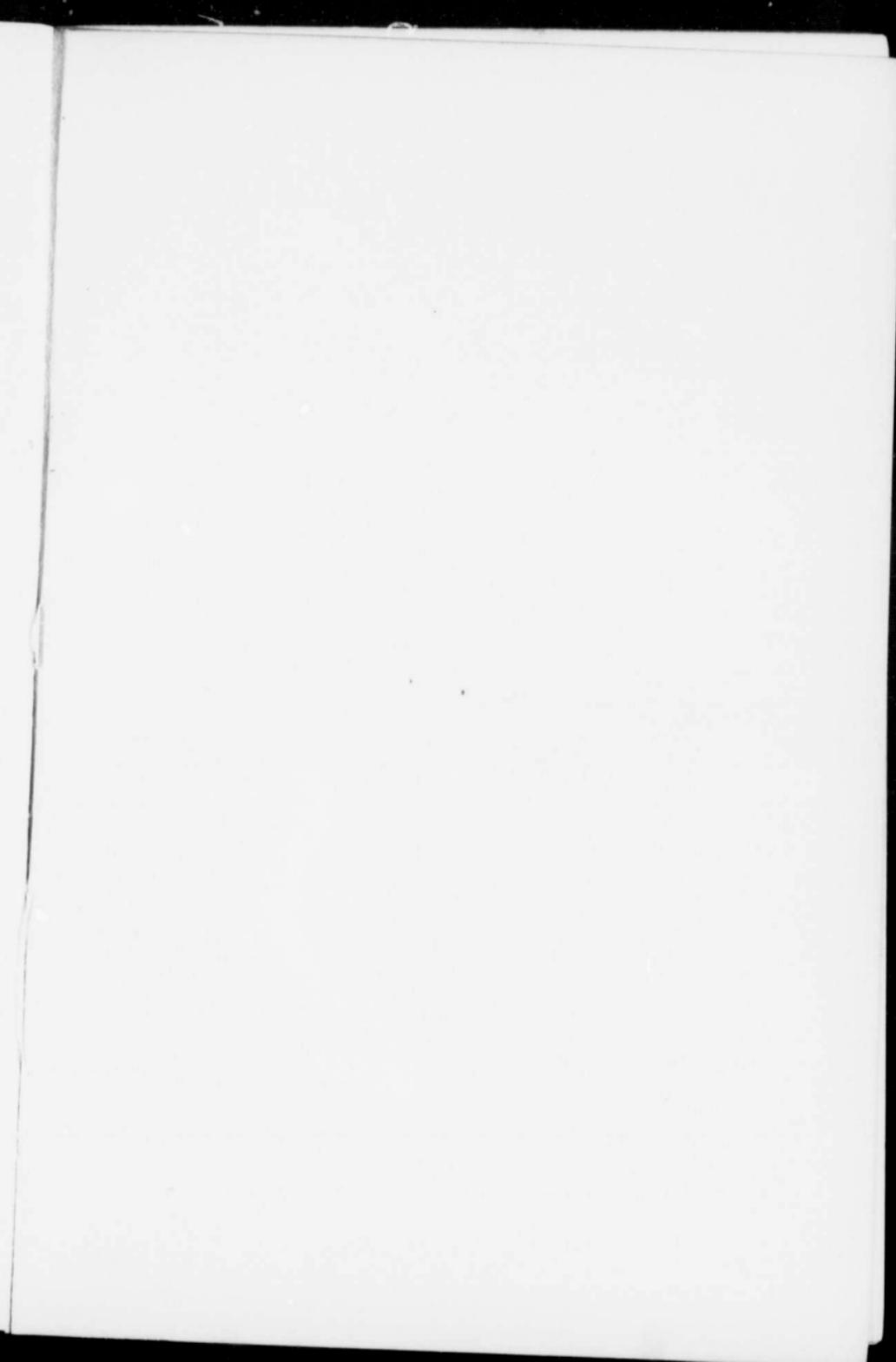
BY BESSIE MARCHANT

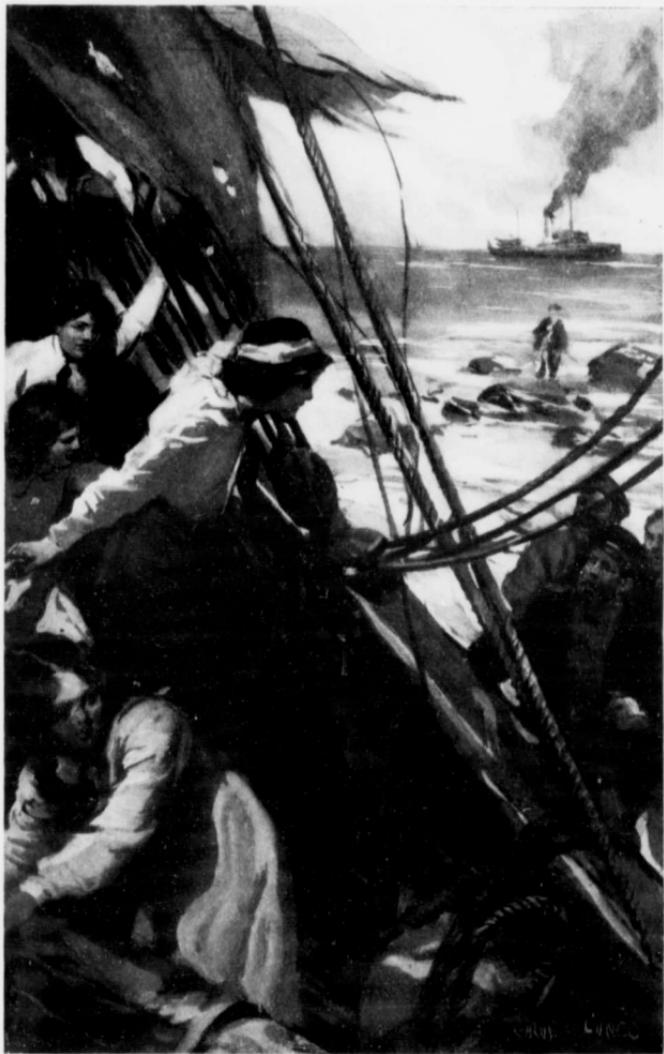
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"GOOD MORNING, MISS,"—"WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?"

A  
Mysterious Inheritance

A Story of Adventure in  
British Columbia

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

Author of "The Heroine of the Ranch"

"The Loyalty of Hester Hope"

"The Adventurous Seven"

&c. &c.

*Illustrated by Cyrus Cuneo*

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# A MYSTERIOUS INHERITANCE

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## CHAPTER I

### Disappointment

JESSICA sounded the gong for breakfast with a flourish. This gong was one of the few relics of better-off days, and the little Frenchwoman on the floor below was properly impressed every morning when she heard the noise, deciding in her own mind that the Amoyne girls must be really aristocratic, despite their very evident poverty.

Then the door of the bedroom opened, and Gertrude came out. She was dressed for the street, except for her gloves, which she carried in her hand, and she crossed the floor with the brisk tread that was characteristic of her.

"Any letters this morning?" she asked, as she took the head of the table. Then, catching sight of an envelope beside her plate which bore the Liverpool postmark, she cried out, with a catch in her breath that was almost a sob: "Oh, oh, there is a letter from Uncle Joseph at last!"

"Eat your porridge while it is hot; the letter will keep, and perhaps it is not worth having after all," said practical Marion, who was secretly worried lest Gertrude's break-

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fast should be spoiled, and in her own mind was quite sure that the letter would not bring much of cheer or encouragement to any of them.

Gertrude took the advice, and set to work on her porridge, while Delia turned the potatoes in the pan, and saw that they were just the shade of brown that Gertrude liked best. The three younger ones always waited on her at breakfast, because she had to start so early in order to reach the factory at Levis in time for her work.

There had been some talk of giving up their attic flat on the Montcalm Mount and going to live in Levis before the winter set in. But it had come to nothing, for the flat was near the school which Delia and Jessica attended, and it was also very convenient for Marion, who had work at a tea shop at the foot of Battery Hill, and was sometimes not home until nine o'clock at night on busy days, although she was not required to be at her post in the morning until an hour before noon.

The potatoes were fried in plenty of dripping, and there was bread-and-butter to follow, with coffee which was made from a recipe given to them by the friendly little Frenchwoman down below. They had meat for supper on most days, but they could not afford to have it twice a day. None of them had a proper midday meal, so breakfast had to be of the most solid description, seeing that the remembrance of it had to last so long.

"Now for the letter!" exclaimed Gertrude, when the porridge had been disposed of, and the potatoes also. Jessica was pouring out a cup of coffee for her, and Delia was spreading butter on her bread. It still wanted ten minutes to starting time, and so she felt quite leisured and luxurious as she slit open the envelope with the bread knife and drew out the enclosure.

A little hush dropped over the others as she read the letter, which was typewritten, and therefore unpromising.

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"Oh, how cruel, how very cruel!" cried Gertrude, and there was so much pain in her tone that Marion reached out and patted her arm with a protective air.

"Never mind, Gertrude, we are no worse off than we were before," she said in an encouraging tone.

"Yes, we are!" cried Gertrude, and her voice was so sharp that Marion winced as if she had received a blow. "We are so much worse off, because we have no longer the hope that Uncle Joseph will help us."

"Read the letter. Perhaps it won't sound so bad when it is spread over the four of us," suggested Delia; but the elder sister was so upset that she passed it to Marion.

Marion glanced down the sheet, and then burst out laughing, only there was not much mirth in the sound.

"Read it! Read it!" cried Delia.

"Yes, hurry up; it is almost time for Gertrude to go!" put in Jessica; and, thus adjured, Marion began upon the letter.

"MY DEAR NIECE,

"I am in receipt of your request that I should lend you money to help you with the education of your sisters, and I am writing to say that, as I do not believe in the over-education of women, I do not see my way to compliance therewith. The State schools will teach your sisters to read and write, and reckon all the money they are ever likely to earn, and that is enough for any woman. Then as for a career, why, there is such a dearth of cooks and housemaids in these days that none of you need ever lack employment. You may even save money, unless you choose to spend it all on hats and frocks, as is the way with most young people, I believe. I do not see that the fact of my relationship to you lays me under any obligation to do more for you and the rest of your family than I have done. My own opinion is that young folks do better when

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they are left to their own exertions than when things are made easy for them.

“Your uncle,

“JOSEPH AMOYNE.”

“I think that the poor man is right there,” said Delia, who was leaning over her sister’s shoulder, “for look at his beautiful son, and what a mess he has made of his chances. Better to have no help at all than to do as badly as that.”

“I am not sorry that he will not help us,” put in Jessica, tilting her nose in the air with a disdainful movement. “We have done very well so far, and although it has been very hard on Gertrude and Marion, Delia and I will soon be ready to take our part now, and then they will be able to have easier times.”

“It is not that Marion and I mind about it!” cried Gertrude hastily. “My trouble is that you and Delia will face the world with such poor chances compared to what we have. Marion did not have so good a training as mine, but even hers is far before what we can give you younger ones.”

“Oh, bother training!” exclaimed Jessica, stretching her limbs with a lazy movement, like a young cat waking from sleep. “I don’t yearn for training, nor for anything at all, except to have a good time, and not be compelled to work.”

“I don’t mind work, and I am going to earn some money as soon as I can,” said Delia. Then she clapped her hands, and, whirling round on the tips of her toes, she went on in a laughing tone: “I think that I will qualify as a cook or a housemaid, and I will go over to Liverpool and get a situation in the house of my uncle. What fun it would be! I would be so nice to the old fellow that he would say I was not to be a mere maid any longer, but

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that I was to keep house for him, take the head of his table, ride round in his motor car—if he keeps one—and have a good time generally.”

“Meanwhile Gertrude must be off to business, unless she is going to miss the boat, and you must get ready for school,” said Marion promptly. The look on Gertrude’s face had warned her that the nonsense of the juniors was hard to be borne just then, and so she was anxious to put a stop to it.

“Yes, I must go,” said Gertrude, rising hastily and beginning to put on her gloves. “I will answer that letter to-night, for it will look civil to reply, although there is nothing that really calls for an answer.”

“Let me write to say ‘Thank you for nothing!’” urged Delia. “I should love to tell him what I think about him, the disagreeable old curmudgeon.”

“He is to be pitied, really, for think how many heart-aches he must have had because of the way in which Douglas has ruined all his hopes,” replied Gertrude. With a nod of goodbye she went out of the room and ran lightly down the many flights of stairs which led to the steep street below. She had been later than usual in leaving the house, and so she had to hurry down the hilly streets leading from old Quebec to the quay where she would catch the early boat across to Levis.

Early as it was, the streets were thronged with people hurrying out to their daily toil. Some, like Gertrude, were going across the river to the busy town on the other side. Others were bound for the factories which had sprung up on the high ground east of the city. Everyone was in haste. It was too early in the day for people to be abroad merely for pleasure, and the faces had the serious look of those who are up against the responsibilities of life.

Gertrude was fairly out of breath by the time she reached the quay and went on board the boat. She was just in

time, too, for the bell was ringing as she went on, and she had not mounted the stairs to the passenger deck before the big craft slipped from her moorings and steamed slowly out across the shining waters of the St. Lawrence.

The ferry was an unwieldy affair, towering high above the water, but it was fairly quick in getting across, and the daily journey compensated Gertrude for many hard things in her monotonous working days.

The river itself was an inspiration, the shipping always gave her a thrill of delight, and then the frowning heights of the city were a picture by themselves.

There was a chill in the air this morning, for autumn was well on its way. But although most of the passengers went into the shelter of the big saloon, Gertrude walked up and down the deck on the side which gave her the best view of the Battery Heights, and tried to get rid of the irritation which her uncle's letter had brought her.

She was angry with herself because she had stooped her pride to ask a favour at his hands. Never would she have done it if the boon had been for her own benefit. But it was Delia she had chiefly in her heart when she wrote. Delia was very much of a problem just now. Quick and clever, she would respond at once to opportunities of culture, and she had the making of a very fine woman in her. But at the present she was marking time, she was even slipping back a little, so the eldest sister feared. The school she went to was not good enough for her now, and Gertrude's earnings would not suffice for anything more expensive in that line. She was seriously considering if it would not be a good thing for Delia to leave school altogether and have a situation of some kind. Here again was a problem, for what situation was she fit for?

"If only I could have her with me, what a comfort it would be!" she said to herself, as the great boat threaded

its way among the shipping and steamed slowly to its moorings on the Levis quay.

There was none of the picturesque grandeur of Quebec on this side. Levis was a place to make money in, and tall warehouses, with factories of all sorts, fairly jostled each other in the wide streets of the river frontage.

Gertrude's work lay in a monster building very near to the ferry landing, and when the lift had shot her up to the fourth floor she walked into a tiny dressing-room, removed her outdoor things, and then went into the big office where she did her daily work. She was clerk in a hat factory, and day after day she checked invoices, examined bills of lading, wrote letters, and kept accounts.

The idea which had come to her in crossing the river, of having Delia with her in the office, at least for a time, clung fast to her still, and she was planning how she could teach her office routine, and get her so thoroughly into business habits as to qualify her to run an office herself. Already she had taught her shorthand and the use of the typewriter, so that if the firm would consent to her coming, and would promise her a pittance by way of pocket money, Gertrude thought it might really be managed.

Doubtless Delia would prefer something different. But when it came to the question of earning one's bread, it was not so much what one preferred as what one could get.

"When I am through with the letters I will go in and ask Mr. Gorman about it," she murmured to herself, as the lift boy brought her a great bundle of correspondence which she had to read and to answer.

These were the letters which had come by the morning's mail. They had been opened and read by one of the firm, the purport of the answer had been scribbled on the envelope or any other piece of paper which came handy, and Gertrude had to do the rest.

For nearly two hours she worked on without a break, for

the pile was an unusually big one, and some of the letters had to be quite lengthy affairs. There were letters from England, from France, and from Germany, and even two or three from Australia, and she had quite a travelled feeling by the time she was through with the pile, for one could not read the letters and answer them without imagining something about the conditions under which the writers lived.

She thought that she had quite finished, and then, as she was rising to go with the pile into Mr. Gorman's room, to get his signature to the letters before she posted them, she saw that an envelope had somehow slipped to the floor.

When she picked it up she saw that it had the Liverpool postmark, and it reminded her oddly enough of the letter which she had received from England that morning.

She sat down again with a little sigh, for by this time she was really very tired of answering letters and making specifications about felt, rabbit skins, sheep's wool, goats' hair, cows' hair, and all the rest of the things that came into the manufacture of hats.

Then when she had opened the letter she gave a little gasp of astonishment, for it was from Joseph Amoyne, just as her own letter had been. But if his letter to her had brought her disappointment, this gave her a sensation of blank consternation which amounted almost to panic, for it referred to some question of purchase of the factory from its present proprietors, Messrs. Gorman Brothers. From its trend she gathered that Joseph Amoyne had already made an offer for the business, and this communication merely had reference to details of settlement in the event of his offer being accepted.

Supposing that the transfer actually took place, how would it affect her personally?

In an ordinary way, and with an ordinary uncle, it might prove greatly to her advantage; but, with her knowledge

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of the way of her father's brother, Gertrude greatly feared that it would mean a month's notice, or even perhaps a month's salary in lieu of that notice, so very prejudiced was Mr. Joseph Amoyne against these nieces of his, whom he had not seen since they were small girls.

"It is like fate—cruel, relentless fate!" she murmured, and then she looked about for instruction as to the reply she was to write, marvelling a little that the firm should have sent her a letter of such a private character to answer.

But there were no instructions that she could find, and so she took the letter with the others into the room of the senior member of the firm, to tell him that it had been sent into her room without the necessary details regarding the answer.

Mr. Gorman was an elderly man of benevolent aspect, and he greeted her with a friendly nod.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Amoyne! Through with the letters, are you? Please wait one moment and then I will attend to you." Turning to the telephone he began talking to someone on the other side of the river, while Gertrude stood and waited.

"Now, if you please," he said when he was ready, and she laid the finished letters before him, which he rapidly glanced through and signed.

"A fairly big lot for one morning. Anything more?" he asked, noticing that she had still another paper in her hand.

"Yes," she answered, handing him the communication from Joseph Amoyne. "There was one letter which carried no instructions with it. I think that you must have forgotten to write them, unless, indeed, you wrote them on a paper which was not enclosed with the letter."

He took it from her, drew it from the envelope, and then looked at her with something like dismay on his face.

"Have you read it?" he demanded brusquely.

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"Of course. I supposed, as it was with the others, that you had sent it to me for that purpose."

"It was a private letter, and I cannot think how it got included with your lot," he went on, in a tone of deep annoyance. Then, after a moment of energetic shuffling of the papers on his desk, a moment in which he made up his mind concerning what to say next, he looked her full in the face and asked in a severe tone: "Can we trust you not to chatter about this matter?"

Gertrude flushed hotly, and an indignant retort rose to her lips, for it hurt her pride sorely that he should ask her such a question. But second thoughts were best; the angry reply was choked back, and she answered quietly: "I have not been in the habit of talking of business matters outside the office, and it is not likely that I shall begin now."

Mr. Gorman had the grace to look ashamed of himself, and his manner was apologetic. "Indeed we have always felt that you have been most discreet with regard to business, and my brother and I have often spoken of the comfort of it. But you can understand how vexed I was at my own carelessness in having sent such a letter with the others. I cannot think how it was that I blundered so badly. By the way—your name is such an uncommon one—are you in any way related to this Mr. Joseph Amoyne of Liverpool?"

"He is the elder brother of my father, who is dead," she replied quietly.

His face cleared somewhat. Perhaps the matter had not been news to her after all, in which case his carelessness would not seem to be such a serious thing.

"But we are not on friendly terms; I mean that my uncle does not care to know us." There was a proud lift of Gertrude's head as she spoke which explained far more than her actual words,

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“That sort of man, is he? Well, we have not accepted his offer yet, and I am not sure that we shall—if we can get a better, that is. In any case, the transfer will not be until the spring, so there will be time to settle that and many other things. Meanwhile, we rely on your discretion in the matter, Miss Amoyne.”

Gertrude bowed, no other answer seeming to be necessary after what she had said before, and then she asked a question about the office work, and, gathering up the letters which Mr. Gorman had signed, left the room.

The request she had been going to make to have Delia with her could not be made now. It was quite out of the question that there should be two of them in a business which their Uncle Joseph was thinking of buying. Indeed, she would most likely be thrown out of work herself, for it was not to be expected that her uncle would care to employ her in such a confidential capacity. He would always be expecting her to take some advantage of her position or to presume on the relationship between them.

“But at least I have the winter before me, and a hundred things may happen before the spring,” she said to herself as she set to work at the next thing to be done. But her labour had lost its zest for that day at least, and she was thankful indeed when the hour of release came, and she could leave the office and set her face homeward once more.

There were only the two younger girls to welcome her when she got home, Marion's tea-shop duties holding her much later.

She climbed the long flight of stairs to-night with a weary tread, although it was more depression than actual tiredness which oppressed her. The day had been so full of disappointment that she felt as if the burden of life was too heavy for her shoulders and that she was being turned into an old woman before her time,

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The others heard her, and Delia threw open the door of their sitting-room, shouting a cheery welcome to greet the tired breadwinner as she climbed the last flight, which was by far the steepest and most wearing of them all.

"Come along, we are quite ready for you, and you must want your tea most fearfully, I am sure!" she called out, with a jolly boisterousness which mostly characterized her.

Gertrude was plainly overwrought to-night, for she winced at the noise, and said to herself that Delia was certainly getting loud and coarse, and she wondered what the dear, dead mother would have said about it all. This made her manner chilly, almost repressive, when she entered the funny old attic chamber which was the sitting-room of the four.

But Delia and Jessica only thought that she was tired with the day's work, and, as she was mostly much quieter than they were, they never dreamed that another care had come to the sister who had to stand in the place of father and mother too.

The attic rooms at the top of that old house were wide, with weird corners and strange slopes. Windows were poked into unexpected places, and altogether the two big chambers were a very unusual kind of home for young girls to choose. But they had two great charms in the eyes of the Amoyne girls—they were fairly cheap, and, as there were only the two rooms at the top, it was like having a flat to themselves. There was one other thing which went far to compensate them for the many inconveniences of living so near the stars, and this was that there were the most lovely views from the windows. On one side they could see right across the river, while from the other side wide stretches of country were visible far away beyond the thickly-clustering houses.

It was too dark to see the view to-night, although long lines of electric light shone like glowworms far down below,

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when Gertrude went to the window of the bedroom and stood looking out for a moment before she took off her hat and coat.

"It is of no use to face to-morrow until it comes, and when it is here there will be the strength and wisdom for its needs," she said softly. Then, rousing herself, she made haste back to the other room, endeavouring to make her face as bright as possible for the benefit of her sisters.

"Congratulate me! I have got some work to do, and from henceforth I shall belong to the vast army of wage-earners," said Delia as she stood the teapot on the table with a clatter.

"What work?" asked Gertrude, and her heart gave a painful leap of apprehension. Delia was given to rushing into things without due consideration, and the elder sister was afraid that the work might be of some grossly unsuitable kind.

"I am going to sell milk at that dairying place at the bottom of Jacques Hill," replied Delia, and there was just a shade of defiance in her tone, for she knew how keenly Gertrude felt some things, and she feared opposition to her scheme.

But the elder sister drew a breath of relief, for the milk business was a safe and wholesome occupation. Moreover, seeing that they were country girls, with the strong love of things rural in their natures, there might be pleasure for Delia in this way of earning her bread.

"I know the place," she said encouragingly, "and it always looks flourishing and well kept. But will they be willing to take you without experience?"

"Yes; I told them that I was still going to school, but that I had been brought up on a farm, and knew all there was to know about the care of milk and that sort of thing. Miss Simpson—she is the manager—told me that they were always keen on having country girls, because they

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could talk in an understanding fashion to the customers on dairy matters. One girl they had thought that milk was made in factories nowadays, and that it was only old-fashioned folks who had it from cows!"

Delia's merry laugh rang out at the thought of this appalling ignorance, and was promptly echoed by Jessica. Even Gertrude had to join in, and presently felt the better for it.

She was comforted, too, because Delia had made a plunge in the direction of getting work. Now, if the worst happened, and Uncle Joseph took over the Gorman factory, throwing her out of employment, there would still be two of them earning money, which would not make the outlook quite so grim.

The day had brought its fair share of disappointment and keen apprehension, but if it was to have a bright ending she was not going to complain, since well she knew that some days must be dark, and sometimes the future would look so black that flesh and spirit quailed before the ominous lowering clouds.

Things had been so different back in the old happy past, when Father and Mother had been alive, and home had been an English farmhouse of the better sort. Then her mother had died, and her father, bitten with the emigration fever, which had swept like an epidemic over the countryside, had sold up everything to come and try his fortunes in the golden west.

But Canada is the young people's land, and when the middle-aged take it by force, striving to wrest from it happiness and prosperity, too often they find that it brings but a bitter harvest of homesickness and loss.

It was so with Mr. Amoyne. He bought a farm in Ontario, and tried to work it by English methods; but everything was against him. He did not understand the climate, nor the conditions, nor anything else. In two

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years he was forced to sell out at a heavy loss; he was driven into the city, where Gertrude and Marion could find work to support the younger girls, and in a few weeks he died, brokenhearted at his failure, which, after all, had been mainly brought about by his flying in the face of common sense.

When he died, the girls stayed on in Quebec, because they had no money to go anywhere else. And although they all hated the city, and fairly yearned for the wide, open spaces and pure air to which they had all their lives been accustomed, there was nothing for it but to bow to circumstances and make the most of such pleasure as was to be got from the wide views over field and forest that might be enjoyed from their attic windows.

## CHAPTER II

### In Peril

THREE weeks passed. The weather, instead of settling down into the keen cold usual to the season, and which was bearable, even enjoyable, because of the stillness and the brightness, was wild and stormy. There were dark and lowering skies, gales that roared up the wide valley of the St. Lawrence, doing fearful damage among the river shipping, and such deluges of rain as flooded the lower parts of the city and turned the marshes around Levis into broad lakes, which would be the finest of skating ground later on.

Delia was settled in the milk store, and seemed to like the life, judging by the racy tales she had to tell the others when the day's work was done. Jessica was keeping stronger than usual, and Marion seemed less disgusted with her tea-shop than sometimes. Gertrude would have enjoyed life in these wild, stormy days, with so much peace at home, if it had not been for her dread about the transfer of the factory, of which she could speak to no one, for, of course, being private office business, no word of it all might escape her lips even to her sisters. So she had to bear in silence. She even had to be misjudged somewhat, for she was always crying out against the simplest pleasure which seemed likely to cost money, and she preached about the necessity of saving so constantly that the others called her Gertrude the Grubber behind her back, and sometimes to her face.

Oh, they were hard days! The pity of it was that she might have been spared all the long weeks of apprehension, which must be her portion until the matter was settled, if only that letter had not been included by accident among those she had to answer, thus putting her in possession of information which had been so much better withheld.

Mr. Gorman had begged her to take no steps to provide herself with a fresh post, as, if the factory was not passed over to Mr. Amoyne, they would be only too glad to retain her services; so she could make no move towards the securing of her future, and could only live on from day to day, hoping, sometimes, when her mood was cheerful, and, when it was not, facing the future with so much fearing and dread that it was wonderful her health did not give way under the strain.

Then came a morning when all the storms which had been raging for days past seemed to have joined forces. The wind was so boisterous that Gertrude, hurrying down to the ferry, was nearly swept off her feet, while the rain beat upon her with so much force that, in spite of her waterproof coat and cap, she was nearly drenched before she reached the ferry landing stage. There was no question of walking the deck to get the air this morning, and she was glad to cower over the hot pipes in the big saloon with the few passengers who had braved the river crossing by the early boat.

"If the wind gets much higher, they say the ferry will cease running at noon," said a man who had come down from the Great Lakes the previous day, and had been thrilling the others with stories of wrecks and disasters.

"I have lived in Quebec for twenty years, and I have never known the ferry service to stop for anything but ice," remarked a grey-haired man in a quiet tone.

"Well, perhaps the weather has not been so bad as it

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is now," said the first speaker; and then the two plunged into a hot discussion regarding the badness of the weather which lasted until they reached the other side.

Gertrude felt rather disturbed, for by accident she had come without enough money to pay her train fare if the ferry should chance to cease running. It was a much longer journey home by train, for the bridge was quite two miles from Gormans' factory, while the ferry landing was only a few steps away from its doors.

The weather might moderate as the day wore on, perhaps; at least it was of no use to worry about it yet. That day's work was unusually absorbing, too, and Gertrude had little time to think of herself and the possible difficulties of her homeward journey.

She was secretly elated by the nature of the work she had had to do; for there had been so many letters to be written containing orders for materials used in the work of the factory that she made up her mind to the belief that the proposed changes might not be going to take place after all—and, oh, what a relief it would be to know that she might keep on working under the old conditions!

She was a little later than usual in leaving the office that night, and, in consequence, had to run to reach the boat in time.

Turning the corner on to the quay she was almost swept off her feet by the blast, and would have fallen but for the burly policeman on duty there, who caught her and set her on her feet again.

"A rough night, miss, and the wind is rising still," he said, with gruff kindness, as she clung to him for a minute to steady herself.

"Yes, it is rough; but the crossing won't take long," she said, her breath coming in gasps.

"It won't take long; but you will get a tidy lot of rolling when you are once out on the current. If you are

given to being seasick you will do better to go home by the cars," answered the man.

"Oh, I am not troubled that way! But I must run, or I shall lose the boat!" she cried, and dashed onwards, keeping her feet with difficulty.

There were fewer people than usual, and those who were on the boat were most of them exclaiming loudly how much they wished that they had gone across by the cars.

Down below, however, there were more vehicles than common, and these ranged from a hot-potato barrow to a huge motor lorry, the two being run in side by side, as they were the last to come. The boat was bright with electric light, and down below everything looked about as usual.

Upstairs, however, all the wind shutters were tightly closed and fastened, and the passengers huddled in groups near the hot pipes, for the wind came in at every crack, and, as one woman said, the place seemed all one big draught.

"It is nothing down here—quite a calm, in fact. Now, if you had been up on the Great Lakes, you would know what weather really is," said someone. Turning, Gertrude saw that it was the same individual who had come over in the morning, and had prophesied that the boat would not run later on.

She had had so much of his stories of horrors then that she determined to escape a further infliction if possible, and she was making her way across into the ladies' room, when a lurch of the boat rolled her off her feet and sent her spinning into a pile of deck chairs which had been brought inside to prevent them from being blown away.

Fearfully embarrassed at the thought of the spectacle she must have presented, she was scrambling to her feet, when there was a fearful rending crash, a riving, splitting noise, as if all the woodwork on the boat was giving way

together, and then a wild chorus of shrieks and cries broke out. Some cried "Fire!" at the top of their voices; some shrieked that the boat was wrecked, and fast settling down; while others fought and struggled in the crush about the door as they tried to reach the stairs leading to the lower deck, where the carts and motors stood, as if they thought that greater safety was to be found there, or at least a better chance of escape.

Gertrude was holding a crying child, whose mother was among the most frantic of the excited passengers, and they were being swept along in the direction of the stairs, when the electric light went out, and darkness was added to the other horrors of that dreadful night.

"Give me my child!" cried the woman whose little one Gertrude had been caring for, and she dragged the wailing mite from Gertrude's arms, and was at once separated from her in the struggling crowd, and swallowed up.

Groping with both hands as the crowd surged past her, Gertrude encountered a post of some sort, and fastened on to it with a firm grasp, for surely anything was better than being swept onward in that headlong rush, with the imminent danger of being flung down and trampled upon.

The wind roared with a blast like thunder, and the big boat seemed no longer under control. There was no steadiness anywhere, and the floor of the saloon appeared to be heaving up and down in the strangest fashion; while, mingled with the raging of the tempest, Gertrude could hear the sirens of the river boats screaming through the darkness.

To add to her terror, she was left alone in the wide black spaces of the saloon. All the people had gone, even their screams, which had been so terrible, had died away, and the silence that was left was more terrible still, for it was like the silence of death.

She was groping on her hands and knees now, trying

to find her way to the stairs, or else outside on the wind-swept deck, for there at least she would see the lights on the shore and on the river shipping, which would lift some of the terror of the awful darkness from her. But just then came another violent lurch, and more motion of the up-and-down sort. With a crash the whole side of the saloon seemed to slip away, and from where she lay, spread out on the floor, Gertrude saw the lights on some craft near at hand, while a frantic screaming, with shouts in stentorian tones, mingled with the noise of the wind, yet failed to convey any sense to her, as she could not hear what was being said.

Then the saloon appeared to spin round with a sickening swing, the wind set dead in at the opening where the side had been torn away, and there was more of the up-and-down motion, which made her think of being in a little boat caught by a fierce current. When the first shock had come she had supposed that the boat had been run into by some other craft. Then she had thought it was aground; but this was plainly not the case, as it kept turning and twisting.

Suddenly her gaze was caught by a leaping flame—a flare on a boat not far away. And then a cry of dismay broke from her, for she saw by the glare that it was the long hull of the ferryboat, and by the leaping flame she could also see that all the top part seemed to be gone, while fixed in amidships was the prow of a big steamer; and the two monsters, interlocked as they were, looked as if they were drifting down upon the wreckage of the saloon in which she was imprisoned.

Then she realized what it was that had happened. The other boat must have crashed into the ferry, and the saloon had been sheared right off in the collision, and sent adrift on its own account, with her inside.

Oh, it was terrible, terrible! And yet it might have

been worse, for she might have been drowned straight-way. As it was, she was safe all the while the wreckage kept afloat, and with so much shipping in the river she would certainly be saved by and by.

She thought she was alone on that bit of floating wreckage, but a moment later she heard someone screaming—and screaming somewhere not far away.

“Help, help, help!” It was a man’s voice, but so hoarse and strained, so filled with fear, that she shuddered at the sound. It was dreadful that anyone should feel like that, and, so far from being comforted by finding that she was not alone, she was dismayed to know that she had such a companion.

But she must do what she could for him, that was certain; so, raising her voice, she called loudly: “Where are you? Where are you? Are you in danger?”

“I am in the water! I am drowning! Come and help me! Quick, quick, quick!” shrieked the man, and there was so much urgency in his tone that she knew she must do something as quickly as possible.

But what could she do? She had risen to her feet, and was clinging to the post still, for the floor of the saloon was heaving up and down, while the wreckage kept twisting in the force of the current, being flung first on one side and then on the other.

“Where are you?” she shouted again. “You must keep on calling, or I shall not be able to find you.”

No need to tell him to do that, for he was filling the black tumult of the night with his cries. Nerving herself for the ordeal, Gertrude left the comparative safety of her position, and, dropping on to the heaving floor, commenced to crawl in the direction of the noise.

Ah, there were the stairs, or as much of them as had not been washed away! But as she crawled cautiously forward, and rounded what had once been a doorway, the

full force of the wind caught her, and for a few minutes she could do nothing but cling helplessly to what had been the door.

The man was calling still, but his voice seemed farther away, and then she guessed that he must be in the saloon below, and doubtless the floor would be breaking up under him.

Would she ever dare to venture down those windswept stairs, exposed as they were to the full fury of the storm? And when she reached the saloon, what would she be able to do? It was like throwing away her one chance of life, and for the first time in her life that she could remember she hesitated from sheer cowardice. And she had always prided herself on being so brave!

A sob of anger came up in her throat and nearly choked her. It was anger at her own weakness and her miserable want of pluck. If only she had been a man, for men were always brave! But were they? It was a whining, piteous shriek of pure terror which reached her ears from below, so it was plain that even men—at least some men—could show the white feather when encompassed by dire peril.

Strangely enough, it was that same terrified appeal which brought back her own courage with a rush. She must do something to try to help the poor wretch, even if she perished in the attempt.

Turning round, she began to make her way slowly down the stairs backward, as very young children do.

There was a cold quality in the rain now which warned her that it might turn to snow later on. A snowstorm with such a fierce wind would be a terror indeed if it came while she was adrift on the wreckage, and her lips were moving in voiceless prayer, as she crawled down the stairs, that this added suffering might be averted.

From the position of the wreckage now she was in full

sight of the flares on the ferryboat. So bright were they that the worst of the darkness was lifted for her, and she was able to reach the entrance to the saloon without much difficulty. There was no plan in her head as to how she was going to help the man who was in trouble down there. Her great fear was that he might be pinned in the wreckage in some way, so that she would not be able to extricate him, and in such a case she would be able to do nothing, save to stand by and comfort him to the end, if the end it was to be.

Death was terrible anyhow; but it seemed to her just then that it would be fairly easy to face it up there on the swaying deck, with the wind roaring past her and the black water down below, into which she might be tossed, and where the end of the struggle would come so quickly. Down there in the darkness of the saloon, with a roof over her head, how could she bear to stand and wait for it?

"But I must help him! I must!" she muttered between her set teeth, and, turning away from the comforting gleam of the flares, she wriggled her way into the dark saloon, going on her hands and knees first, but rising to her feet when she was once inside and sheltered from the full force of the wind.

She had need to move warily now, for there was a sound of washing to and fro, while the motion of the wreckage was more violent. She was in danger of being flung heavily, or banged against the jumble of chairs and other things which crowded that end of the saloon.

"Where are you?" she cried sharply, for the man had ceased to call out, and there was no sound or any sort save that sinister noise or washing water and the howling of the storm.

"Here, here! I am pinned down by something! Make haste, for pity's sake!" he gasped; and the sound was so

close to her that she gave a little jump backwards, because she was so afraid of stepping on him.

Oh, for a gleam of light! If only she had a match to light the scene for a moment, how thankful she would be! But there was nothing, nothing but the terrible darkness.

Groping and groping with her hands, she presently encountered the arm of a man stretched out, and gripping what seemed to be the leg of a table which was fixed to the floor. But when she stooped to lay hold of him, to help him to scramble out, she was horrified to see a faint glimmer in the darkness, and all at once realized that she was gazing down at the water. A part of the floor had been washed away, and the man must be hanging in some perilous fashion on the edge of the wreckage.

"We must pull together," she said sharply. "Now then—one, two, three—pull!" She set her teeth hard, and flung her whole strength into the effort, until it seemed as if she could bear no more, but would be dragged down into that horrible gulf with the sickly gleam of water at the bottom.

Would the strain never end? The man appeared to be caught in some way; then, just as she was feeling she must cease pulling, there came a sound of rending, and he was freed with such a jerk that she was knocked backwards, and for a moment rolled helplessly on the floor. She scrambled to her feet in a great hurry as a crash sounded somewhere close at hand; more of the wreckage had been washed away by the rush of the water, and she was sure that their best chance of safety lay in getting back to the place from which she had come.

"Can you stand and walk?" she panted. She was shaken and bruised with her fall, and her right foot hurt her so much that she could scarcely put it to the ground; but instinct warned her that they must not linger there.

"I don't know; I feel as if I had no feet," answered the

man in a heavy tone; and then he added, as if in explanation: "I have been in the water for so long."

"In the water!" echoed Gertrude in dismay; then she called out in sharp protest as the man lurched heavily against her, because she was nearly flung down again.

"I beg your pardon, but I do not seem able to stand," he said in apology.

She managed to steady him until they reached the door of the saloon where the stairs went up; then she bade him drop on his hands and knees, and crawl after her round the corner and up the stairs to the upper deck.

"We can't go there; we shall be blown away in this awful wind. It was blowing over seventy miles an hour, so they were saying, before the crash came," objected the man, halting, and trying to drag her back when he began to feel the full force of the tempest.

"If we stay here we shall probably be washed away, and I prefer to die outside, if die I must," replied Gertrude, dropping on her knees. She crawled round the corner, and gripped the first step of the stairs, holding on with all her might. She had motion as well as wind to contend with now, and the two combined rendered that upward journey a nightmare experience.

The man was close behind her; she could hear his panting breath and the short ejaculations in which he expressed the terror of his heart.

She could not help him now; indeed, it was all she could do to help herself, for the higher she went the more she felt the force of the wind. She could see nothing of the flares on the ferry either, and a black horror seized her lest the big boat, with its freight of humanity, had foundered. But when she reached the top of the stairs the wreckage had swung round again, and she could see the lights once more, only now they seemed so far away. Probably the wreckage was travelling fast on the swift

current of the river, while the boat, if her engines were working, was not moving in that way at all.

To her great dismay she found that the opening into the ladies' room, where she had been sheltering before, was now completely blocked; and, the wreckage having swung round into the teeth of the wind, the place at the top of the stairs was almost untenable.

But there was a door flapping to and fro just beyond, and, crawling to it across a stretch of slippery deck, she called to the man to come and shelter with her. Their united weight would keep the door from moving, and it would shelter them, if only a little, from the keen cold of the driving rain.

"We must just stay here until we can be rescued," she said, as she helped him to crawl out of the full force of the gale. "It is of no use trying to get farther into shelter. We may be washed away in making the attempt."

"It is of no use trying to live; it is only prolonging the agony of dying," replied the man, who was stupid with terror. "I shall let go when the next lurch comes, and roll off into the water to end it that way."

"You will do nothing of the sort!" cried Gertrude shrilly, with so much contempt for the man in her heart that some of it was bound to come out in her speech. "It is only a coward who would give up like that, when we are sure to be rescued if only we can hold on long enough."

"Are we certain to be rescued? Listen to that!" he said.

There was another crash somewhere down below; the wreckage gave a violent lurch, and settled lower in the water. Without doubt the end might be a question of minutes now, unless help was at hand.

"I can't stand waiting for death like this; I am going to throw myself into the water," said the man, rising from the floor, where he had been crouching, and beginning to

make his way to the edge of the deck, where the rails had been torn away. There was a lurid gleam in the blackness of the night now, and she could see his big bulk outlined against it as he moved slowly towards the edge.

A great horror surged into her heart. She could not, would not, let him throw away his life like this. She had been very near to despair herself; but, now that there was something to be done, hope woke again, and with it the instinct to keep up the struggle to live.

"Stop, stop!" she cried, and her voice rose shrill and clear above the roar of the tempest, cutting through the boom of the troubled waters and the howling of the wind. The men on some craft anchored lower down heard the noise, and wondered where it came from; and the captain of one boat made haste to rig up a sort of searchlight, for surely it must mean that someone was in peril out there among that smother of black water which hurried so swiftly to the sea.

The man paid no heed to Gertrude's shouting, but crawled steadily forward. He was crazy with terror, and his one thought was to end it in the only way he knew, and to do it as speedily as possible.

"I dare not let him go!" she muttered; and, dropping hold of the framework to which she had been clinging, she crawled out from the poor shelter of the flapping door, and, reaching the man, seized him by the collar of his coat, then hauled him back with more vigour than ceremony.

He raised no protest, only whimpered feebly, and her scorn of him was so great that she could have struck him in her anger at his cowardice. It may be that her rage and disgust did her good, for she had the less time to think about herself as the wreckage was caught in a swirl of the current, and began to spin round and round as if it were going to settle down.

There was no time to think, no time to pray. A fleet-

ing vision she had of her three young sisters, and the picture of the two big attic rooms at the top of the old house in the high part of the city stood out sharply clear in her mind. How the girls would sorrow for her, and how hard the struggle of life would be for them, lacking her help and the money she had been able to earn! Then the water rose up over the shelving deck, the wreckage tilted suddenly, she was thrown back against the door to which she had been clinging, the man was thrown heavily against her, there was an appalling crash, and she knew no more.

## CHAPTER III

### Marion Hears the News

It was Jessica who came home first in the evening now, and very proud she was of getting the fire lighted, and the evening meal in course of preparation, before Delia was released from selling milk at the dairy store.

At first, when the evenings grew dark, it had needed all her courage to climb up that last flight of stairs, and enter the sitting-room alone. One day the ordeal looked so bad prospectively that she was on the point of knocking at the little Frenchwoman's door, and asking her to accompany her up those steep, narrow stairs, so that she might not have to unlock the door and go in alone.

But Jessica had her fair share of pride. Indeed, Marion often said that Gertrude and Jessica were the proud ones of the family, while she and Delia had hardly enough between them to make them hold their heads up in the world.

It was Jessica's pride that would not permit her to ask the Frenchwoman to go up with her. She could dimly remember their home in England, and she knew very well what they had made of the home in the back country, when they first settled in Canada. To either of these homes any stranger might have been welcomed. But these two poor attic rooms, which were all that they could afford, with their sloping roofs and uneven floors—oh, she could not bear that any stranger should enter there! So, screwing up her courage to meet the demand upon it, she began to mount the stairs with a firm tread.

She was halfway up, and her heart was beating like a sledge-hammer, when the door at the bottom was opened suddenly, and Mme Delarey poked out her head.

"Is that you, Miss Amoyne?" she asked in the mincing speech which she had before assured them was the real Parisian accent, although it was open to doubt whether she had ever heard a Parisian speak at all, as she had been brought out to Canada by her parents from a farm in Brittany when she was only five years old. But she had a kindly heart tucked away under the cheap lace with which the front of her blouse was profusely adorned, and she had been waiting just inside her door for the last half-hour in order to hear Jessica come in, for she thought that the child would be scared at the prospect of going up alone in the dark.

"Yes. Do you want me, Mme Delarey?" asked Jessica in surprise, for they had never had many dealings with their neighbour on the floor below.

"I have lighted a small lamp for you, so that you may see to unlock your door. You can bring it back presently, after you have got your stove started—any time will do." The little woman nodded her head and smiled so kindly that the heart of Jessica warmed to her instantly.

"How very kind of you!" she said, realizing all at once how very much afraid she had really been. "I do hate going up those stairs in the dark."

"Then do not go," rejoined the little woman promptly. "You have only to come to my door, and you can have the lamp every night; and see, I will leave my door open for a little time, until you have got your room lighted up."

"How very good you are!" cried Jessica again, because she had no other words to express her gratitude; and every night after that she went to Mme Delarey's door for the lamp, and so her terror of the dark was overcome, and her pride was saved at the same time. For it was not a

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boon which she had craved for herself—it was a kindness offered to her, and that, in her eyes, was a vastly different thing. Then, too, the Frenchwoman showed real tact, for she never once suggested coming upstairs with her, and so Jessica did not have to put her off with an excuse, or let her know in any other way that her presence was not desired in that poor attic room.

It was not really poverty-stricken, and it was spotlessly clean, while there were touches of refinement here and there which showed that the occupants had not always been used to such circumscribed quarters.

On the evening of the great storm Jessica came home as usual, and having got the lamp from the Frenchwoman, she went upstairs, and, unlocking the door, entered the room, which felt so chill and desolate from having been locked up since Marion went off to the tea-room in the morning.

But a few minutes sufficed to alter that: a cheery fire was crackling in the stove, and the lamp on the table was lighted, sending a rosy glow into the farthest corners of the quaint old room. But how the wind roared and howled, while the rain dashed in sheets on the window which looked toward the river!

The storm was very bad to-night, and the child shivered, thinking how very glad she would be when Gertrude came in. It would be fearful coming over on the ferry to-night. But perhaps Gertrude would take the longer way home by the cars. Even then she would have to cross the river, and the little girl shivered again as she recalled grim stories of bridges being blown down and swept away in tempests like the one which was howling round the house to-night.

Of course there were storms like this every winter, and she was foolish to be so afraid. She would make haste and get a very nice fire ready by the time her sister got



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"REACHING THE MAN SHE SEIZED HIM BY THE COLLAR OF HIS  
COAT AND HAILED HIM BACK"



home, so she plied the cracked stove with fuel until it glowed red, and the room grew warmer and warmer.

The evening meal was quite ready, and she had put a fern on the centre of the table to make it look pretty. Then, because her fears came rushing back upon her every time a blast roared shrieking by, she knelt down in the shadowy corner beyond the stove to pray that Gertrude might reach home in safety that night.

When she shut her eyes she could see the dark water of the river lashed into angry waves by the wind, and the mammoth ferry boat rolling and plunging among the billows, and with a little inarticulate cry of dread she opened them, so that the cheerful fireglow and lamplight of the room should take away her fear.

It was at this moment that she heard the hasty run of feet coming up the stairs, and she sprang up with glad relief at her heart to think that her prayer had been answered so quickly, and that Gertrude was already at home.

But was that Gertrude's tread?

In a moment Jessica's heart sank with a gloomy foreboding, and when, a minute later, Marion burst breathless into the room with her hat put on anyhow, and her coat unbuttoned, the younger sister realized without any telling that something was wrong, and, standing with a scared white face, she gasped:

"Has something happened to Gertrude?"

"Oh, I hoped that she was at home! It is past her time, and I came to see!" cried Marion, sinking on to a chair which stood near the door, because she trembled so badly that her limbs could not support her.

"I thought it was Gertrude when you began to run up the stairs. What is it that you are afraid of?" asked Jessica, whose throat had suddenly become parched and dry from apprehension.

"A man came into the shop and said that the ferry had

been damaged in a collision while crossing from Levis, and I asked the manager if I might come home to see if Gertrude was all right, because the man said that it was feared some of the passengers were drowned, because the deckhouse had been partly carried away in the collision," said Marion, who was still gasping for breath. She had run every step of the way from the tea-room, and then had mounted all those long flights of stairs as fast as she could pelt; so it was little wonder that her breath had gone.

"I am going down to the ferry landing to see where she is!" announced Jessica, turning to the peg where her hat and coat were hanging.

"No, dear, please." Marion's tone was fairly coaxing, as she rose to her feet. "I will go myself, while you stay here to have things ready for her. She will be very worn out when she comes in, and I think we must have a hot bath ready for her. Will you put more water on the stove to get ready for her, and wait here, in case Delia comes in? I won't be long."

Jessica's hand dropped from her coat, and she turned without a word to the corner where the saucepans were kept. She must do something; and if it was better that Marion should go in search of Gertrude, then she herself must fill in the weary time of waiting somehow.

Downstairs fled Marion, but paused at the bottom of the first flight to answer a question put to her by Mme Delarey. Then down, down, down, until the echoes of her tread died to silence. For a few minutes Jessica moved about with feverish energy. Then she went into the bedroom, the wide old attic room, with its two beds, where the four sisters slept. She was bringing garments out to the stove that they might get warm for Gertrude at the fire.

A sound like a step on the stairs caught her ear, and she hurried out to find that the kind little Frenchwoman

had come up all unbidden to see if there was anything that she could do.

Jessica forgot all about her reluctance for anyone to see the poverty of their home, and welcomed the little woman so warmly that Mme Delarey forgot to be affected, forgot likewise all about the Parisian accent of which she was so proud, and, sitting down on a low stool by the stove, just drew Jessica into her arms, holding the child in silence, because even her voluble French tongue had no consolation for a trouble like this.

There came a quick run of feet coming up and up and up.

"It is Gertrude!" gasped Jessica, her pinched face becoming suddenly radiant.

But it was only Delia, who had heard tidings of disaster to the ferry, for news of the accident had spread like wild-fire over the city, and she had come home at a run, as Marion had done, to see if Gertrude had reached there in safety.

"Marion has gone down to the landing to see if she can hear news of her," said Jessica, with a dry, gasping sob. She was by this time quite sure that Gertrude had been drowned, and she was wondering what life would look like without the wise elder sister who had been mother, aye, and father to her also.

"If only I could die too! But perhaps I shall," said the little girl, her clasp tightening about the neck of the little Frenchwoman, and seriously upsetting the cascade of lace which adorned the front of the Frenchwoman's blouse, when Delia had gone again, to look for Marion.

"Pouf!" cried the little woman disdainfully. "Of what use are the dead? To cry out for death, when all your life stretches out before you! It is to live that you have got to do, to suffer, and be strong, to comfort those poor dear sisters, who will grieve equally with you if aught

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of ill has occurred to mademoiselle. But le bon Dieu is in Heaven, and why should you be afraid? See, I will go to my apartment and make coffee for the weary sisters when they return. And you will mend this fire, and compose your face to peace, that you may help them to bear, and in helping them find consolation for yourself."

Clever little Mme Delarey! Jessica was to prove the truth of her words, when, an hour later, with sorely dragging feet, white faces, and dripping garments, Marion and Delia climbed the long stairs to their home.

Nothing had been heard of Gertrude. They had spoken to many of the passengers from the damaged ferry, but no one recognized her from their description, and no one seemed to think she could be on the boat.

"We believe that all the passengers are in safety," said an official to whom Marion applied. "But of course we cannot tell yet. You see, there was a stampede of the passengers downstairs when the first crash came, and it was their panic which saved their lives, as they were all down in the hull of the boat when the deckhouse slid off. It was a most remarkable disaster, and we are very thankful that it was not worse. We will make every possible enquiry about your sister, and, of course, we have already dispatched boats in search of the wreckage, which, in a gale like this, will be a fearful menace to the shipping lower down the river, especially as the night is so dark."

"When all that had been explained to me, it seemed useless to stay any longer in the rain, which will be snow very soon," said Marion, who was shivering violently.

"I am sure that you were right to come home," said Jessica quietly, instead of bursting into lamentations because the others had not stayed to wait for news of the missing sister.

She plied them with the lovely coffee which Mme Delarey had made, insisting on Marion having the hot bath which

had been got ready for Gertrude, and, with the help of Mme Delarey, she soon had the two girls into bed.

But she would not go herself, for news might come in the night, and it would be too terrible if Gertrude should arrive home in the middle of the night to find that they were all in bed and perhaps asleep.

So she kept the lamp alight in the outer room, and the fire burning in the stove. When everything was quiet, Mme Delarey came creeping back upstairs to sit with her; for surely it was too hard for so young a girl to watch alone, the kind little woman said, although, with rare tact, she had disappeared when Marion and Delia came home, leaving the three sisters to comfort each other.

Slowly, slowly the hours crept by. The wild fury of the wind dropped to a plaintive moan, which sighed among the tall chimneys like a creature in pain. The driving rain turned to snow, which fell thickly and silently until the lagging daylight crept over the hills bordering the river.

Mme Delarey went downstairs to her own rooms then, and, putting out the lamp, Jessica moved with a languid step across the floor to waken her sisters, for the day's work would have to be done in spite of sorrow and anxiety, and they would have to go on living somehow, even if Gertrude were dead.

She had reached the bedroom door, and her hand was on the latch, when a sound from below caught her ear.

Someone was coming up the stairs. There was a sickening throb at her heart, then she sprang back to the outer door, which she flung wide open with a joyful clatter, believing that it was Gertrude who had come.

But it was a man, just an ordinary waterside workman, who looked like a figure on an iced cake, so coated was he with the falling snow.

"Does anyone named Amoyne live here?" he asked,

pausing at the sight of Jessica's eager face looking down over the banisters.

"Yes, yes! Have you brought news of my sister Gertrude? We believe she was on the ferry last night," and Jessica came running down the stairs to meet the messenger, while Mme Delarey opened her door and poked out her head to hear the news also.

"A man and woman were rescued from some wreckage lower down the river last night, and have been brought ashore to the hospital," said the man in his thick, gruff tones. "The man ain't much the worse, though not at present able to give any account of himself; but the woman—she is only a girl—is in a bad way. They don't think she'll pull through. And the name of them both is Amoyne, as was found from documents in their possession. I was sent from the hospital to tell you that you had better come at once."

"Which hospital?" put in the voice of Mme Delarey.

"St. Luke's," answered the man briefly, and then, staying to answer no more questions, he turned and clattered down the stairs as fast as he could go, for he had been on night duty, which at this time of the year was very hard, cold, and sometimes dangerous work.

Jessica fled back up the stairs, and, dashing across the room, flung open the door of the bedroom, crying out in tones which were hoarse with pain:

"Wake up, wake up, both of you! Gertrude has been found adrift on the wreckage, and she has been taken to St. Luke's Hospital. But they have sent for us because they do not think that she will live. There is a man taken there too, who is also named Amoyne, so the messenger said; but that, I think, is a mistake. Oh, do hurry to dress, both of you; for, just think, we may be too late, and poor Gertrude will have to die without saving goodbye to us!"

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"I will not believe that she is going to die!" cried Delia stoutly, as she buttoned her boots with rapid fingers. "Courage, little sister! If Gertrude was not drowned, then we may hope that she will pull through."

"So say I!" put in Marion, who was also dressing at record speed. But Jessica wailed, and was not to be comforted. She was worn out with watching and anxiety, and it seemed to her like the irony of fate that her sister should have escaped death on the river only to die in hospital.

## CHAPTER IV

### Better than their Fears

GERTRUDE did not die.

By the time the anxious trio of sisters reached the hospital she was already beginning to respond to treatment. Only Marion was allowed to see her, and that merely for purposes of identification.

"Do not speak to her unless she seems to want it, and then only for the briefest moment," said the nurse who received Marion at the door of the ward. She was an autocratic kind of person, and, gazing coolly at Marion, she went on: "I hope that you may be trusted not to make a fuss."

"I hope so too," replied Marion brusquely, for civility under strain was not her strong point.

But the nurse nodded in a satisfied manner, and led her to the far end of the ward, where a screen had been drawn round a bed to hide the occupant from the view of the rest of the ward.

"Oh! is it as bad as that?" gasped Marion, turning pale, and pausing on the outer edge of the screen. She had heard that they drew a screen round patients who were dying in hospital wards, and so she immediately leaped to the conclusion that Gertrude was in extremity.

"Your sister is not dying, if that is what you are afraid of," replied the nurse. "But she was brought into the ward between two and three o'clock this morning, and she had then been in her wet garments ever since the wreckage

of the ferry capsized, which might have been about six o'clock yesterday evening; and we had to do what we could to avert the danger of rheumatic fever, so it was better, for the sake of the others, to screen the bed, you see."

Marion nodded. Speech was not easy just then, for there was a big lump in her throat, and she was feeling so desperately near to tears that it was all she could do to maintain even a semblance of composure.

A step round the screen, and she saw Gertrude lying on the narrow hospital bed, with a white face and a bandaged head, which only served to accentuate the gravity of the situation.

But her eyes were open, and she moved her lips, only no sound came.

Marion read the eager question in her sister's eyes to mean anxiety about home affairs, and at once spoke to relieve that very natural trouble.

"We shall be quite all right, dear, now that we know you are safe," she said, in such a calm, matter-of-fact tone that the nurse nodded approvingly.

But that was not what Gertrude wanted, and her lips moved again, while there was such an imploring look in her eyes that Marion bent down to hear what it was that she was saying.

"The poor man, where is he? He tried so hard to roll into the water, and it was all I could do to hold him back. Then the crash came, the wreckage tipped up, and I slipped into the water."

"It is the man she wants to know about. There was a man on the wreck, was there not?" Marion asked of the nurse.

"Oh yes! he was saved, and he was not much the worse." The nurse had leaned over the bed now to let Gertrude hear. "He was brought into the hospital when

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you were, but he will be able to go out this morning, for he only had a ducking, and he is recovering nicely now."

"Thank you!" murmured Gertrude, and then her heavy eyelids closed, and she seemed to sleep.

The nurse drew Marion away. "You must not stay, for you will understand that sleep is life to her now. It is your sister, is it not?"

"Yes, it is Gertrude," Marion replied, and loyally buried the pang she had felt because her sister's anxiety had been all about a stranger, and not about the young sisters who had waited through hours of dread and keen apprehension.

"If you come to the hospital about six o'clock this evening," said the nurse, when they had reached the end of the ward, "we shall be able to tell you more about her. Only I cannot promise that you will be able to see her; it will have to depend upon how she is."

"I will come if I can, and if I cannot get away at that time, one of the others will come," Marion replied, for six o'clock was always a busy time at the tea-shop.

Then a sudden thought came to her, and she asked abruptly: "Who was the man who was on the wreck with my sister? The messenger who brought the news said that his name was Amoyne too, but it seemed scarcely likely, because it is such an uncommon name, and we have almost no relations."

"It was Amoyne," rejoined the nurse. "Mr. Joseph Amoyne, of Liverpool, England, he said it was; but I understood that he said he had nothing to do with your sister."

"I see," answered Marion, with a nod which might mean anything, and then she came down the stairs and rejoined her sisters, who were waiting for her in the entrance hall.

"How is she?" The question came from both of them

at once, and Marion summoned up as cheerful a manner as was compatible with the occasion.

"Why, of course she looks ghastly, and she has her head bandaged, which makes it appear all the more dreadful, but they all seem to think that she has a fair chance of pulling round comfortably. Of course there is the danger of rheumatic fever, and they will not know for a certain number of hours whether she will escape it or not. What a mercy that she is in hospital, where she will have the very best chance possible!"

"I was thinking how dreadful it was that she should be where we could not care for her!" cried Jessica.

"However much we might care for her, we should not know how to do the things that would save her from pain, and it would be just selfishness to want her back when we could not do the best for her," put in Delia. Then she asked abruptly: "How did her head get hurt?"

"I don't know. I don't even know whether the nurse knew," said Marion. "But Gertrude spoke to me. She was in such trouble about the man who was on the wreck with her. She said that she had had such a job to hold him. And who do you think it was? Oh, it is more like a novel than real life!"

"Mr. Gorman?" ventured Delia.

"Wrong! That would have been only commonplace," said Marion, with a laugh, as she hurried them through the snowy streets on their way back to Montcalm Mount.

"No, the man whom Gertrude saved from being drowned last night was Mr. Joseph Amoyne, of Liverpool, England!"

"Uncle Joseph?" gasped Jessica.

"I should say so, unless indeed there are two Joseph Amoynes in Liverpool, which does not sound likely," replied Marion. "I wonder how he feels now he knows that it is one of his despised nieces who rescued him when he was in peril?"

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"Look here!" cried Delia in a vehement tone; "if he wants to do anything for us out of gratitude for Gertrude's help, let him do something for her, for I don't want his charity. I would rather serve in a milk store all my life!"

"Perhaps he won't want to do anything out of gratitude, so there is no sense in getting agitated so early in the day," Marion answered calmly, as they paused at the door of the house where they had their home.

Then they climbed the stairs to the top floor, and while Delia got breakfast ready Marion undressed Jessica as if she were in very truth a baby, and put her to bed, for the little girl was very much the worse for the long night of watching, and the only thing to be done was to put her to bed at once.

When breakfast was over, Delia went away to sell milk, while Marion did the housework and looked after Jessica.

What anxious hours they were for them all! Delia turned sick whenever anyone entered the store with a quicker tread than ordinary, and Marion had a sinking at heart every time she heard a step on the stairs. Even Jessica, who had been awake all night, could not rest in peace because of that eager anxiety for tidings.

But the day wore on. The evening report from the hospital was more quieting. The night passed, and in the morning the news was still encouraging. Then the girls permitted themselves to hope. They even grew cheerful as they looked forward to the time when Gertrude should be free to come out of hospital.

Of course they all expected that now their uncle would make some sort of overtures to them, if it were only for the sake of learning the latest news of how Gertrude was getting on. But the days grew to a week, and that became a fortnight, with never a word of any sort from him.

Mr. Gorman was much kinder, for he sent to St. Luke's several times for news of his clerk; and one evening he

made his appearance at the old house on Montcalm Mount, and had to be received in the one room which did duty as dining-room, kitchen, and sitting-room combined. But he was so very pleasant, and he said so many things that were kind about Gertrude, that when he had gone the girls declared he was a perfect dear.

He said that he was getting on very badly without Gertrude, but that he would rather let the work fall into arrears than be compelled to have a stranger in the place, as it was hoped she would soon be fit for work again. He had brought a lovely bunch of flowers with him, and he told Marion that only half of them were to go to the hospital for Gertrude: the rest they were to have for their own use.

"How perfectly lovely of you!" cried Delia. "I mostly come home the longest way from business at night, because I love to look at the flowers in the De Quincy Nurseries."

"When you go to see your sister again," said Mr. Gorman as he shook hands with Marion at the top of the stairs, "you may tell her from me that she may rest easy as to the future, for our business deal with Mr. Joseph Amoyne has fallen through. We found that he wanted more for his money than we could see our way to give; so I fancy that he will not come to reside in Quebec, although he told us he was in correspondence about a business venture in Montreal."

"Uncle Joseph! But I don't understand!" and Marion's face wore such a puzzled expression that Mr. Gorman nodded approvingly, for it was very plain to him that Gertrude had spoken no word to her sisters on what she might so easily have construed into being family business.

"Ah, I see that you know nothing about it! But your sister does, and I fear that it has been something of an anxiety to her for some little time past. We thought of passing over the business to Mr. Joseph Amoyne, and

indeed he came over from England to see the factory, for he is very keen on establishing himself on this side. He was with us the very day of the accident to the ferry; but I do not think that he cared for what he saw, for he has not been again, and from letters we have had from him since we have gathered that he was considerably disappointed in Quebec as a business centre."

Marion had never been particularly reticent, and it did not occur to her that there was any need for reticence now, so she burst out brusquely:

"Uncle Joseph was adrift on the wreckage with Gertrude, though, of course, she did not know him, for, you see, it was so dark, and even his voice would not be familiar, as she had not seen him for years, and never expected to encounter him there. But she rescued him from the lower floor, where he was pinned down in some way, and when she managed to get him up on the upper deck, where there seemed more chance of their being rescued, he said it was of no use to prolong the agony of dying, and so he should roll off into the water and end it all. She managed to hold him back from doing it until the last crash came that shot her into the water. He was taken to the hospital where she was, but being, comparatively, none the worse for his adventure, he was able to leave some time during the next day. But he has never, so far as we know, even enquired how Gertrude was getting on, although she risked her life to give him a better chance. A mere stranger would have been more kind, and yet he is our kinsman, our father's only brother!"

"He must be a very extraordinary man!" exclaimed Mr. Gorman, for it seemed to him that anyone might have been glad to have these bright, capable girls for nieces.

"I think, poor man, he is so afraid that we shall ask favours of him," replied Marion, with a breezy laugh. "Indeed, Gertrude did write to him one day and ask him if

he would help her to send Delia to a better school, so that she might have a chance of college later on; and he wrote back to say that he did not believe in women being educated beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. So you may guess that we are not specially fond of our uncle."

"Indeed no, you would hardly be that," said Mr. Gorman. He went away thinking what a lucky escape he and his brother had had in avoiding a business deal with a man of such a calibre.

But Marion turned back into the sitting-room with a somewhat chastened feeling. She was sure that Gertrude would not have approved of her being so frank concerning family relations, and she was disgusted with herself for having spoken so freely. But it was of all things amazing to her that Gertrude should have carried the heavy load of anxiety about the future and not said a word to any of them about it.

"I could not have kept such an astounding piece of news to myself if I had tried!" she cried, as she burst in upon Delia and Jessica with the news.

"But if it was business she would have to keep quiet about it, would she not?" asked Jessica, who in many ways was far more like Gertrude than either of the others.

"Well, of course it is not business-like to chatter about things outside the office," conceded Marion. "All the same, I should certainly have done it, because it was such an amazing coincidence, and things of that sort always did interest me. Now I understand why Gertrude was so anxious to save money, because of course she expected to be thrown out of work, and oh, it does hurt me to think that we called her Gertrude the Grubber!"

"But of course she understood that we did not know the reason, so she would not feel so bad about it," said Jessica soothingly.

Marion's contrition for having judged her sister so

harshly found expression in all sorts of loving service for Gertrude when she came home from the hospital. It was a very weak and shaken Gertrude who came up those flights of stairs after a cab had brought her up from St. Luke's. She had been at hand-grips with death in a very terrible form, and the remembrance of it was not to be lightly shaken off. It would be some days before she would be fit for her work again. Meanwhile it was good to come back to her home, to be surrounded by the love and the kindness of her sisters, and to take up her old life little by little.

On one point she was very firm, however, and that was, she would allow none of them to say a word against Uncle Joseph, nor yet to criticize his action in never enquiring after her, either at her home or at the hospital.

"I think he would like to forget all about that night," she said quietly, when they were hotly condemning him for his base ingratitude. "He was so horribly panic-stricken. I never could have believed that a man would be in such terror, although it is conceivable that a woman's nerve might have gone to pieces under the strain. His one idea will be to banish everything which would in any way bring the recollection of that time back to him; and I have so much sympathy with him that if I had been in his place I think I should have done very much the same as he is doing."

"Poor darling!" murmured Jessica. "I should think that you do not want to think of it either."

"Frankly, I do not," replied Gertrude, with a shiver. "And, at the present moment, I feel as if I could never cross the river on the ferry again. But that is foolish, and I do not mean to let my nerves rule me when it should be I who rule my nerves. So the very first morning that the sun shines I am going to cross on the ferry, just to break myself in before I go back to the office."

"But is there any need to harrow yourself like that?" asked Marion reproachfully. "It would be quite easy for you to travel to and fro on the cars this winter, and the extra expense would not matter so much now that Delia is earning money. Or we could even go across to Levis to live; we are not bound to stay in this house."

"All the same, we like to stay here," Gertrude answered, with a laugh, as her gaze went round the queer old room. "If I gave in to my nerves about the ferry I might some day take on a panic lest the bridge should break down, or there should be a smash-up of the cars. While if we went to Levis to live there would be travelling expenses for three of us, instead of only one, and that would make a vast difference to our income."

"That is common sense," put in Delia, with a nod. "But you must promise us that if it blows and rains, as it did on the night of the collision, you will come home by the cars. You must remember that you have our nerves to think of as well as your own, and many nights such as the one when you were missing will make old women of the three of us. I had the feeling that I should be grey-haired in the morning, and I cannot think how I escaped it. But I suppose it was because I went to sleep, and sleep is the great healer."

"You don't look in much danger of grey hairs at present," said Gertrude, with a laugh. Then by common consent the talk wandered away from the accident and its attendant horrors, and was kept away for the rest of the evening.

It was two days later before Gertrude was able to muster strength for the walk down to the ferry. The sun was shining from a sky of cloudless blue when she walked on board, and there was not enough wind to fan her cheeks as the huge craft slipped slowly from her moorings and steamed out on to the shining water of the great river.

A sense of unreality was on Gertrude as of set purpose she made her way to the upper deck. Either that nightmare experience of the accident was a dream, or else she was in a dream now. Of the two she preferred to think of the terror as being unreal, because it would make the everyday coming to and fro easier for her; and having schooled herself in this fancy she arrived on the Levis side of the river calm and serene.

She was rapturously received by the lift boy, to whom, in view of her recent experience, she was a heroine of the very first rank. Then the lift shot her upwards to the office, where Mr. Gorman was doing her work with a very bad grace indeed; while his brother, the senior partner, interviewed all comers in the other room, and felt the irk of the unaccustomed round of duty as much as his junior.

Both gave her a hearty welcome, and told her to come back to her post as soon as the doctor saw fit to let her work; and then Gertrude went back across the river on the ferry, feeling that she had prevented her nerves from becoming her master for that time at least.

## CHAPTER V

### News of Enrichment

THE weeks of winter slipped away. There was the usual frost and snow, the keen cold, and the brilliant sunshine which yet seemed to have no warming power in its rays. Then the days grew longer, the nights were shorter, and a perceptible difference made itself felt in the sunshine, which now became hot, instead of merely warm. This was followed by cloudy days, much gusty wind, violent rain. The miracle of resurrection set in which we call spring, and dead nature awoke to life once more.

For Gertrude it had been a very trying time. It had not been easy to get over the shock of that time when she was afloat on the wreckage. There had been days when she could scarcely do her office work for dread of crossing the river on the ferry at night. And there had been many nights when she had lain sleepless through the hours from sheer dread of going on board the ferry in the morning. But through it all she had persevered in going her usual way, knowing that therein lay the best medicine for the nervous strain, and by the time that softer weather set in, and everyone began to complain of feeling languid and spring-weary, she was recovered sufficiently to be able to smile and feel cheerful once more.

There came a morning when the postman, toiling up the many stairs of the old house on Montcalm Mount, brought a letter which changed the outlook of all of them.

This letter came from a firm of Liverpool solicitors, and

informed them that their uncle, Joseph Amoyne, had died very suddenly.

The letter stated also that Gertrude and her sisters being next-of-kin to the dead man, they would inherit what was left, as Mr. Amoyne had left no will.

"Is Douglas dead?" asked Marion in an awed tone, as she looked over her sister's shoulder at the solicitor's letter. Douglas was her uncle's son, and had been the playfellow of the girls in those far-away happy days before their fathers quarrelled and refused to know each other.

"I suppose he must be," answered Gertrude. "How very sad it seems! He used to be such a nice boy, and would have been still nicer if his father had not spoiled him so much."

"Humph!" ejaculated Marion. "Tastes differ. I remember that I always thought Douglas Amoyne peculiarly horrid. But at least he has done us a good turn in dying, so that we might have his father's money."

"Oh, hush! Don't talk of him like that," cried Gertrude, and there was so much pain in her tone that Marion instantly repented of her own callous utterance.

"What is this enclosure?" asked Delia, who was fingering a sealed envelope contained in the solicitor's letter.

"They say it was found after Uncle Joseph died. Several fragments there were, and they have sent me the most complete," answered Gertrude, referring again to the letter from Messrs. Freeman & Willis, the Liverpool solicitors.

"Open it and read," suggested Jessica; and Gertrude did as she was requested. All the time she had the strangest feeling of her uncle's presence, and the same sort of scorn for his weakness that she had felt on that never-to-be-forgotten night when she had seen his portly bulk outlined between her and the night's dark sky, as he was trying to fling himself into the water, to shorten the agony of dying, as he supposed.

But of this she could not speak to the others. She had guarded the fact of his weakness from her sisters as far as she could, because it seemed too terrible to be talked about, and of choice she would not have opened that inner envelope in front of them. But she could not refuse to do it without more reason than she at present had.

The lawyers were right in calling the enclosure a fragment, for although it had a beginning, it had no ending, and was not signed. But it was in the handwriting of Joseph Amoyne, and appeared to have been written at different times.

“MY DEAR NIECE, GERTRUDE AMOYNE,

“I am not sure that I shall ever get sufficient courage to send this letter to you, even if I can bring myself to write it. When I was rescued from the wreckage of the ferryboat, because you had kept me alive to be rescued, I made up my mind that I would never in any way refer to the incident, because of the cowardly figure I cut in the face of danger. But I find that, although I may refuse to speak of it, I cannot banish the incident from my memory. It haunts my days, and makes my nights a terror too great to be borne. When I fall asleep I am always living over that dreadful time again. I am constantly hearing you come down the stairs and into the saloon, where I lay waiting for death; and then again I experience the horror of that climb up the stairs, and there comes over me the memory of that mad impulse of mine to end my suffering by rolling into the water. I want to thank you for restraining me then. Not that any words of mine can adequately convey the boon these added weeks of life have been to me. I have had time to sort myself, as the Scotsmen say, and to settle many things with regard to this world and the next. Now, when I come face to face with the grim enemy of mankind again, it will not be terror,

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but relief, that I shall feel, for death in my case will set the prisoner free. It is strange indeed that it should have been you, my own kin, who shared that awful terror with me. At the time it was to me an added humiliation that one of my own blood should have looked on my weakness, and I went away, making no sign, never even asking how you fared, because I was so deadly ashamed. Now, in the light of all that has come to me since, I ask you to forgive as you may hope to be forgiven——”

The fragment broke off here, but Gertrude's eyes were wet with tears, and the other girls, when they had read the pitiful confession of their uncle's weakness, and his penitence for it, left it in silence, never discussing it among themselves.

“Oh, it is so late!” cried Gertrude, with a sudden remembrance of the time. “I shall have to run or I shall miss the ferry, and it will not do to be late at the office.”

“I should have thought that you would not have gone to the office to-day; it hardly seems respectful to Uncle Joseph's memory,” grumbled Jessica.

“What are you going to do about the letter—will you take it with you and answer it at the office?” asked Marion.

“I shall not take it with me,” replied Gertrude; “but I will just send a brief acknowledgment of it from the office, because it will be too late for the English mail when I get back to-night. I wish that you would take it round to Mr. Carson this morning, Marion, and ask him if he will act for us. You see, the lawyers ask us to put them in communication with our man of business, and he will act for us, I am sure. Think how good he was to us when Father died!”

“Had you not better go yourself?” said Marion, a little doubtfully. “You are the eldest, and the only one of us

who is of age, and so I suppose all the business will come to you."

"I can't go; we are so busy at the office this week," replied Gertrude. "And by the time the office hours are over, Mr. Carson's office would be closed also. But if you will go and see him for me he will probably make an appointment when I can see him."

"Very well, I will go, only I am sure that I shall blunder. I always do. It is my great failing that I cannot talk to people." Marion gave vent to a dismal sigh, which set Delia laughing, for Marion was the most ready of them all at repartee, and she owed much of her popularity at the tea-shop to her quick and merry retorts.

But Gertrude was halfway down the stairs by that time, and she failed to hear the laugh, which was just as well, for in her present mood it would have jarred horribly.

To Delia and Jessica their Uncle Joseph was little more than a name. It was the two older girls who could remember him best. But Gertrude was only eleven years old and Marion nine when the bitter quarrel took place between the brothers, making the breach which had never been healed, and had separated the two households entirely.

As in most other troubles of a similar character, both brothers were to blame. But whereas William Amoyne, the father of the four, repented, and most earnestly sought to be reconciled again to his brother, Joseph would not consent to overlook the past, or to mend it in any way, and so the two had been as strangers until the end.

Then Joseph Amoyne's wife had died, and his only child, Douglas, had disappointed every hope centred in him, finally running away from his father's house and becoming an outcast in the world's wide ways; and the old man, his father, lived solitary until the day of his death.

All these things were in the mind of Gertrude as she

slowly paced up and down the deck or the ferry in the soft air of the spring morning. There was real sorrow in her heart for the kinsman who had gone so solitary to his end.

She was so occupied with pity and regret that not as yet had she any time to think of the difference in the outlook of herself and her sisters. That would come later, when she was quite sure that there were no barriers in the way of their inheriting; for it would not be in nature not to rejoice that the younger girls would have the advantages which she had craved for them, and she herself would be delivered from some of the grinding cares that were stealing away her youth.

The office hours went by as in a dream that day, and then at length Gertrude found herself on her way home again, to be met by Jessica at the landing.

"I came down to meet you because Mme Delarey said that she would boil the kettle on her stove for me, and it was nice to come out-of-doors this evening," said the little girl, with a long sigh of pure rapture. Having no regrets, and no sad memories in connection with her uncle's death, Jessica's mood was most unusually jubilant to-night.

"It is very pleasant to be met, for these long hilly streets are so tiring at night when one is alone," said Gertrude, with a sigh, thinking of the black heartaches which she had experienced sometimes that winter as she mounted the steep rise to the upper part of the city.

"Marion has been to Mr. Carson, and he knows all about Uncle Joseph having died, for he has had to do business for him on this side," burst out Jessica eagerly. "He—Mr. Carson—says that Uncle Joseph offered a reward of two hundred pounds for tidings of his son; that was two years ago. It was printed in all the papers on both sides of the Atlantic, but no one ever came forward to claim it, and so his death will be assumed by this time."

"I wonder we did not see it—the notice of the reward," Gertrude said musingly.

"Do we read the papers, ever?" asked Jessica. "You may see one at the office, perhaps, but you would not look in the right place for a thing of that sort, perhaps. Anyhow, we did not see it, and it would not have made any difference if we had, seeing that we did not know where cousin Douglas had gone."

"Poor boy!" sighed Gertrude. "He was only two years older than I am. It is dreadful to think of his life having come to some sad, unknown end. His father used to be so proud of him, and Aunt Dora thought that there was no one like him. Oh, it is just tragic! I am really thankful that she did not live to see all this trouble."

"It will be very nice to have money," said Jessica wistfully. "We shall be able to go and see places, and we can buy flowers in winter, and all sorts of pleasant things will be possible. We will just have a glorious time at first; please, please say yes to that. And then afterwards we will settle down to work, and get clever. At least we younger ones will work, although I guess that you are about as clever as you need to be."

"Oh, I have a few things to learn yet!" answered Gertrude, with a laugh. "But if that money does come to us we will have the very nicest summer that we can manage, and you shall do no lessons until the fall."

"That will be just lovely!" cried Jessica, doing a festive skip on the pavement. "I shall lie awake to-night to think out the pleasantest way of spending summer that can be imagined. We must go where it is sea for Delia, and country for Marion, and forest for me, while you will want plenty of books. Oh, dear, I wonder if we can make it all fit?"

"We will try, at any rate," laughed the other, as the two reached the old house on Montcalm Mount and began

to climb the long flights of stairs. "And, Jessica, we will have no stairs to climb for the summer at any rate, for these long flights have taken nearly all the courage out of me this winter."

Getting supper was like a festival that night, and for a wonder Marion was home as soon as Delia, so they were all able to sit down to their meal together.

They would have been madly merry if it had not been for the thought of the lonely man, their uncle, who had left no one but themselves to mourn him. But although on his account they were serious, and restrained in expression, there was an undercurrent of gladness, and so many rose-hued hints of happiness within their grasp that they scarcely seemed to be eating commonplace food.

Naturally the talk was all about their future. Mr. Carson had told Marion that Messrs. Freeman & Willis would certainly not have written as they had unless they had some evidence of Douglas Amoyne's death, and so there was no question about their certainty of inheriting.

Jessica mooted her idea of a summer holiday, and everyone fell in with it as a matter of course, because, after their winter of hard work, they were all so tired that the thought of a long idle time was just delightful, and they talked the question over from all its aspects.

Then Delia suggested that they should winter in England, London for choice, where they could have lessons in various subjects. To this also Gertrude agreed, but not without some secret wonder, for it had never occurred to her that Delia would be keen on culture.

"I would rather settle down on a place in the country, and begin to grow things," grumbled Marion. "I have had to feed people for so long that it will be a change to feed pigs instead. Not that some of the humans are very much removed from swine in their little habits of pushing, crowding, and grabbing for the best. But there is this

difference in feeding pigs with four legs, that it is etiquette to hit them on the nose when they push too much, and it would hardly do to treat the humans in the same fashion—not at our tea-shop, at least.”

“Perhaps you will be able to feed pigs and grow things later on,” replied Gertrude. “But I am sure that it will be better to get a little more knowledge first, and there are the young ones to think of.”

“There is also the fact that we have not got the money yet. So I vote that we leave the future where it is for the present, and go to bed really early to-night, for I am most dreadfully tired, and I have not got over my interview with Mr. Carson yet. Do you know, Gertrude, I am positive that the poor man thought that I had come to borrow money from him. And what made me happy was that I am equally certain he was prepared to lend us some, just to get us out of our trouble for the present, you know. But it was a sight to see his face when he had read the letter, while he gave me the most beautiful bow that I have ever seen when he started congratulating me on our good fortune. It is amazing the value people always put on money. Now, there was no difference in me—not the real me—between the time I went into his office and when I came out again. Yet from his treatment of me you might have thought that the touch of a fairy wand had turned me into a fresh person altogether.”

“It is the way of the world,” answered Gertrude, with a wisdom born of experience.

Then they set about their preparations for the night, and went to bed to dream of all sorts of delightful things which had come within the range of possibilities.

Oh, it was fine to have money, and in consequence the power to do as they liked! Their lives had been so grey during the last few years, the struggle for a living had been so stern, that they seemed to have lost the art of

enjoying life. But they were going to find it again; so, while Gertrude dreamed of books and the fine arts, Marion dreamed that with her share of the money she had bought herself a farm, and was rearing six-legged calves for the country shows. But the dreams of the two younger ones were of lying in hammocks slung under trees near the sea, and the murmur of the surf was in their ears when they awoke.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Camp in the Wilds

"GERTRUDE, Gertrude, it is just perfect!" cried Delia, and her shout of joy was promptly echoed by the other two.

Gertrude turned round on the front seat of the loaded wagon to nod and smile in a sympathetic fashion. But, as she had been there before, she had already got over the first of her raptures.

The wagon bumped off the corduroy (as the Americans call a roadway that is laid with tree trunks), and sank nearly to the axle in sand, where it stuck, despite the valiant efforts of the sturdy team to move it forward.

"It ain't no manner of use, miss," said the driver, looking at Gertrude with a resigned expression, which said as plainly as possible what his private opinion was of doings such as these. "The hosses can't stir the wagon another foot; so if you are set on camping out beyond the Bluff, why, the things will just have to be toted across on our shoulders."

"Just what I think," rejoined Gertrude crisply. Then she clambered down from the wagon, and, seizing a bundle or two, set off across the sand, followed by the other three all similarly laden, while the driver prepared to hitch his horses to a convenient stump, and then set to work on the transportation of the heavier bundles to the place which had been chosen for a camp.

He was not impressed by fine scenery himself, so the

background of forest—where cedar, spruce, balsam, hemlock, and butternut rubbed shoulders with basswood, poplar, and mountain ash—had no charm for him, except as judged from the standpoint of fuel or fence rails; and the sinuous curves of the little bay, with the distant glimpse of the tide coming in over the stretches of golden sand, suggested nothing much except the possibility of clams for supper.

The spot was a lonely bay on the coast about forty miles north of Vancouver city. The shore was deeply indented at this part, some of the bays running so far into the land that they might almost be termed inlets. The roar of the Pacific breakers dwindled here to the soft lapping of little waves against shingle and rocks, while on the wide reaches of sand the tides came up and receded with never a murmur.

It was the long stretch of Vancouver Island that broke the force of the ocean swell, and although they had storms of a sort in the Straits of Georgia, they were very small affairs as compared with the tempests which raged on that misnamed ocean, the Pacific.

The four girls had come westward early in June, and, taking up their quarters in Vancouver city, had spent the weeks until the middle of July in making excursions from that point, always with the idea of finding the ideal camping ground which should be sea, country, and forest combined.

The sea and the country had seemed a comparatively easy combination, and they had almost decided on camping out on the delta of the Fraser River, close to the boundary line between Canada and the United States, when Jessica, who was keen on trees and hills, begged Gertrude to see what the northern coast was like.

Gertrude had made an excursion on her own account then, and it is easy to do things when money is no especial

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object. A friendly Scotswoman was found who knew that part of the country almost like a book, and she at once declared that they could not do better than settle on Clamping Bay.

Then she took Gertrude to the place, showed her the towering heights clothed with forest from base to summit, and long stretches of yellow sand, with the water coming in, and Gertrude knew that she had found a spot which would suit them all.

The Scotswoman, whose name was Mrs. M'Whortle, proved useful in many ways. She and her husband, with half a dozen children, lived at a lonely farm round a spur of the mountain, out of sight and sound of the sea. It was a long three miles from the M'Whortle homestead to Clamping Bay, and there was no habitation nearer, saving a deserted farm about a mile inshore. But this solitude suited the girls very well, seeing that they were alone, and would be for a day or two, until Mme Delarey should arrive. They had sent the little Frenchwoman a warm invitation to spend the summer with them, and, as they had paid her travelling expenses likewise, she was only too thankful for the chance of such a holiday.

They were anxious, however, to get the camp in working order before she arrived, and so they had arranged for her to reach Poplar Ridge a day or two later than themselves.

Poplar Ridge was the jumping-off place for the wilderness in that part of the world. It boasted a store, a bank, a sawmill, and at least a dozen houses and shacks. There was even an hotel of a sort. And Gertrude had bargained with the driver who had brought them over to Clamping Bay to bring Mme Delarey out to them when she should arrive.

Meanwhile there were the tents to be pitched and the housekeeping to set on foot, and a very busy day stretched

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before them all. They had taken lessons in setting up their tents from the man in Vancouver city of whom they had purchased the camping requisites, for well they knew that it would not do to depend for such help on any chance countryman who might be hired to convey their goods and chattels over the six miles of bad trail between Poplar Ridge and the shore.

Being able to purchase the best, these tents were easier to pitch than most, so Gertrude and Marion had succeeded in getting the first one up before their charioteer had brought the last bundle of their baggage across the sand and round the bluff.

The camping place was on a little natural clearing looking out to sea. The ground rose steeply behind it, and fell away in a sharp descent to the sands in front. There was a small stream of very clear water about half a dozen steps from the dining-room tent, which was also kitchen tent and store-room, and even the unenthusiastic driver had to admit that it was a "rale purty sitioation".

There were two big tents and one small one, the last being for the use of their guest, for they thought that the little Frenchwoman would most certainly want some place in which she could be absolutely private. One of the big tents was to be sleeping-room for the four of them, and it looked very cosy indeed with the four little camp beds and the latest thing in camp toilet-tables. A waterproof sheet had been laid on the ground, and a strip of matting over this gave the necessary touch of comfort to the whole. Delia and Jessica managed the arranging of the interior while Gertrude and Marion struggled with the day tent.

This second one proved much harder to pitch than the first, and they were glad of the aid of their driver—who rejoiced in the name of Wilberforce Washington—to assist in the task of getting it fixed securely.

There was no time for lunch, but when anyone felt

hungry there was a box of provisions standing handy, so that no one need suffer from want of food.

Mr. Wilberforce Washington seemed to have the greatest appetite, and Delia declared that he fed with the utmost regularity every fifteen minutes the whole day through, while the amount of food which disappeared was simply amazing.

However, there was enough and to spare in the way of provisions, and if he ate a great deal he was also uncommonly good at work, and he seemed to take a real pleasure in seeing that everything was safely fixed, so that the wind could not blow the tents over nor rip up the sailcloth.

They did not trouble about pitching the little tent to-day—that could be done to-morrow, or even the day after—and when the other things were settled to their satisfaction they were thankful to sit still and rest.

Then Mr. Wilberforce Washington hitched up his team, and said he guessed he had better be making tracks for Poplar Ridge, as his supper would be waiting for him; whereat the graceless Delia went off into a gurgle of laughter which nearly choked her because of her efforts to suppress it.

Perhaps it was because they were all so tired that a wave of sadness dropped upon them when the burly settler had gone.

Never before had they been alone in such a solitude, and the thought of the night in front of them seemed appalling to all of them except Marion, who declared that she would far rather be alone in the country than in the city, and was so vigorous and bright that the others were compelled to become cheerful also.

The day tent opened to the west, and, sitting at the tent door, they watched the sun sink like a ball of fire into the water. Then they had to make haste into bed, for their only means of illumination was a hurricane lantern, and as

all the kerosene for that would have to be brought from Poplar Ridge, it seemed best to be economical. Moreover, who wanted to sit up at night when they could get up as early in the morning as they wished?

Gertrude slept badly that night, and several times she was certain that she heard soft footfalls outside their canvas habitation, and a snuffling sound, as if some creature of the wilds were anxious to find out what manner of thing that canvas house might be. But although she held her breath in fear and apprehension, and although her heart beat in resounding thumps, she was careful not to wake the others, for there is nothing so demoralizing as terror, and she did not choose that they should be frightened without cause. So much of their future happiness might depend on how that first night sped.

So Gertrude resigned herself to a sleepless vigil in order that the others might have peace. Then she fell asleep in the dawning, and had to be roused by the others, who laughed at her for being so drowsy on such a glorious morning, and never guessed at her long hours of watching during the night.

But the joy and the fun of the morning more than compensated for the anxiety of the night, and when Gertrude discovered the prints of a stray dog's feet on the sand at the back of the night tent, and when she further found that the intruder had scratched a hole in the ground under the tightly-drawn canvas and had worked its way in, stealing half a pound of butter and a great piece of bacon, she felt quite happy. If the creature prowling round the tent was only a dog, then there was no reason for fear, indeed it was rather pleasant than otherwise. So she went off with the others across the sands for a dip in the sea. But the dip proved not easy to get, as the sands stretched for miles. The tide was out, and when they reached the water, after a long walk, the only chance of bathing which came

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to them was to lie flat on the sand and let an incoming wave roll over them.

But the fun of it all was glorious, and when they had all succeeded in getting their bathing dresses wet through they ran away back to the tents to get breakfast ready.

Being somewhat new to the task of kindling fires in the open, and sternly resolved not to use more kerosene than was really necessary, breakfast took so long to get ready that they decided in future to bathe only two at a time before that meal, while the two not bathing would be able to have it ready in reasonable time.

"Still, it is only half-past six o'clock now, which is not bad for lazy people on holiday," said Delia, with a yawn which said more plainly than words that she did not think about getting up quite so early the next day.

"Speak for yourself with regard to the laziness," put in Marion briskly. "Now, I propose that we just arrange watches—spells of duty, or whatever you may like to call them—so that two of us may always be at home while two of us are gadding far and wide. We might change partners every week, so when Delia and I pair one week, it is Jessica and I the next week; then there will be no danger of getting rutty, or disjointed, or anything else that is unpleasant."

"That is a very good idea," said Gertrude warmly, "and I suggest that you and Delia take this morning for exploring, while Jessica and I stay by the stuff. I have several things to straighten up, and I shall be so glad to sit still and do nothing, while Jessica is half-asleep already."

"I am most fearfully sleepy, and I don't want to do anything at all except sit in the sunshine and shut my eyes." Jessica yawned widely as she spoke, then, struck by a sudden thought, she asked anxiously: "But who is expected to wash the breakfast dishes? And what about dinner, or do we call it lunch?"

"Oh, we have to wash the dishes, of course, and we

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must be thankful that we have not to wash our clothes into the bargain!" laughed Gertrude. "But as you are in such a sleepy condition I do not mind doing it for you myself this time. As to dinner or lunch, we won't have any. There are a big box of crackers and plenty of potted meat for anyone who is hungry, so we will concentrate on supper. That is to be punctually at six o'clock, mind, and the person who comes late for that meal will have to wash the dishes singlehanded."

"What a lark!" chuckled Delia. "I will take jolly good care that I am never, never late for supper. Now, Marion, what is it to be? Are you going to prospect for precious metals in the hills, or are you going to make sand castles and that sort of thing?"

"Neither the one nor the other," rejoined Marion, who was leaning back in her chair very much at her ease. "I am going to inspect that deserted farm that we passed yesterday on the trail. It has got on my nerves, and last night I dreamed that we came there to live. So I am going to see if I want my dream to come true, and if it looks at all promising I will dream about it again to-night—that is, if I can."

"Very well," said Delia, "the farm let it be, though I fail to see where the fun comes in. Still, we have got to explore the country, and as the farm would have to be taken with the rest, it might as well come first as last. I propose that we set off straight away, then we shall be back before it gets too hot to be comfortable. Oh, I say! isn't it just lovely to have nothing to do, and to know that there are weeks and weeks in front of us in which we can just sit down to take things easy? When I think how my feet ached with trotting to and fro in that old milk store, I don't know how to be grateful enough to Uncle Joseph for his kindness in omitting to make a will."

"I suppose it is because you are growing so fast that

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you are always tired," said Marion, as she reached for her hat and a serviceable walking-stick. "Now, I feel as if I had energy enough for anything—that is, anything in the stir-about line, though I should draw a line at that bag of books Gertrude has brought along for her own private and particular consumption. A light, engaging story, not too long nor too profound, and, above all things, not too sentimental—a book of that sort I can do with when I am too tired for walking, or riding, or rowing. Oh! by the way, Delia, shall we have a canoe? I don't mean one of those things that are always upsetting, but a nice substantial dug-out, or something of the sort. Just think what a joy it would be to pull along the coast when we were too tired for walking! We might even take things with us and picnic along the shore."

"A jolly thought!" agreed Delia. "But we have got to find out where to beg, borrow, or steal the thing, unless, indeed, you propose that we cut down a likely tree and make one ourselves. They are burned out, are they not?—that is to say, you cut a little notch in the timber somewhere, build a fire over it, and leave it to time."

"Oh, of course! But if the time is too long, or the fire too fierce, I guess it is all up with the chance of that particular trunk turning into a dug-out. It would more probably be a cinder, or a heap of cinders. No, we must buy a boat of some sort. We ought really to have a donkey also, or a mule, something on four legs which would do as a very moderate weight carrier, for figure to yourself what we shall do with poor little Mme Delarey in these wilds! How I wish that Gertrude had asked the driver with the high-sounding name to bring us a beast of burden! I should love to ride again. Do you remember that old donkey we used to have at Templeton?"

"I remember it stopping very suddenly one day and sending me flying over its head," replied Delia, with a

laugh, which, however, ended in a sigh, for Templeton was their early home in England, the place where their mother had died, and the very mention of the name was enough to bring up a crowd of sad memories. The mother had been the very centre of their home life, and in losing her they had lost their home.

But one could not be sad very long on such a morning, especially after a night spent under canvas at a place like Clamping Bay; and soon the two had plunged again into eager talk and happy planning of the future which stretched so brightly before them. Oh, it was good to have money, since money brought so many pleasant things in its train and such a lifting of the responsibilities of life!

Yet, even in the midst of all this happy looking forward, one of them at least found a crumpled rose leaf, and presently Marion broke out, with a sigh: "It is such a bother having to go to Europe for a year. So far as I am concerned it means a year wasted, for I would far rather that we bought a little place in the country and settled down to a rural life."

"What is the use of having money if we are going in for hard work just like those folks who have to earn their livings?" asked Delia with the sturdy common sense which she was wont to display on occasion.

"There would be the satisfaction of doing something, I suppose," said Marion, and a dreary note crept into her voice. "I just loathe the thought of dragging round to picture galleries, museums, and the graves of the illustrious dead by way of completing one's education, when I would so much rather be learning how to graft fruit trees, and the most expeditious way of fattening poultry for market. I believe that farming runs in families, like insanity and that sort of thing, in which case it is only reasonable that one of us should display the family trait, seeing the many years in which the Amoynes have been tillers of the soil."

"Father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather—yes, it is a good way back," replied Delia in a musing tone. Then she asked suddenly: "Would you like to go back to Templeton to live?"

"No, no; I could not bear it!" cried Marion hastily. "I should always be seeing Mother come out through the glass door of the hall to chase the chickens from the flower-beds. How she did love those flower-beds! And how very often the gate was left open for those same chickens to get in! Oh, Templeton is a dear, sweet memory, but I do not want to go back there! I want to stay in Canada, and I am afraid that when once we get on the other side there will be no coming back for any of us."

"Having money, we can do as we like," said Delia, with an unconscious puffing out of her chest, which would have made Marion laugh at any other time, but which passed without comment now, because she was so much absorbed.

"That is just where you make a great mistake. The girl who has her own way to make is independent, and can, within reasonable limits, go where she pleases, but the girl who has money, even though, as in our case, it is only a little money, is hedged in by all sorts of conventions, prejudices, precedents, and all the rest of it, until life becomes a thing of grooves."

"Perhaps, then, you would like to go back to the old days at the tea-shop, when you had no money and life was not hedged in by conventions, but only walled in by necessities," said Delia, with a note of sarcasm in her voice, for to her Marion's mood was downright unreasonable.

"Oh no, words cannot describe how I loathed that tea-shop!" cried Marion, with a shudder. "I would have railed against it more than I did if it had not been for the example which Gertrude set us of never complaining. But here is my farm, and oh, what a desolation it is!"

The trail veered a little at this point to pass what had

once been the gate of the farm orchard, where a few wind-blown twisted fruit trees, unpruned and uncared for, made the bravest show possible under the circumstances. Beyond the orchard came the house, which had so plainly once been the pride of someone that a misty feeling crept into the eyes of Marion as she looked, because of the ruin wrought by disuse and neglect. It had been painted white once, with green shutters of the Venetian sort, but the white paint had worn to a dingy grey, the shutters hung, some of them, by one hinge, and the door had one panel stove in, while weeds and grass grew right up to the little veranda. Oh, it was an indescribable desolation, and looked as if it had not been inhabited for the last ten years!

"I wonder why there is so much abandoned land in this part of the country; it gives me quite a melancholy feeling," said Delia, who had shivered and turned her back on the house, looking across the vista of forest which opened out beyond the orchard.

"Mrs. M'Whortle was telling Gertrude it was because of the difficulty of marketing produce. She said that was the thing that killed the small farmer—ruined him, I suppose she meant—and added that they had been trying very hard to establish a butter factory in the neighbourhood, because if that were done the farms would at once be taken up again, and so the neighbourhood would become prosperous. She said that this farm had been named 'The Welcome Home', and it was the sight of it yesterday, as we rumbled past on the trail, that set me longing not to go to Europe to have my mind improved, when all the time I should be wanting to be here to improve something else, which would repay the effort much better than my mind is ever likely to do."

Delia laughed, for Marion in a tragic mood was always a figure of fun. Then they went round the stables and sheds looking at the ruin wrought by neglect, and marvel-

ling that the person who had put so much work into the place had been willing to abandon it. When they had seen all there was to see, they turned their steps back to the shore, because the sun was getting very hot, and they were in a mood to be lazy.

To their great surprise they encountered a small boy on a big bony horse riding along the trail from the shore, so he had evidently been down to the camp and was coming back. But although he nodded and smiled he did not draw rein, and his horse, choosing to shy at that moment, executed a caper so wonderful that the two girls backed hastily into the brambles to be out of reach of its heels.

"That was a narrow shave; we could hardly have beaten it in the city!" exclaimed Marion, panting a little, for the heels of the horse had been so near to Delia's head in one wild flourish that she had dragged her sister back from danger, toppling them both into the brambles.

"I am scratched from head to foot, but I suppose it is much better than being kicked," replied Delia. Then she said urgently: "Let us hurry, Marion, for I am sure that he has brought us news of some sort."

"It is too hot to hurry," panted Marion, who was feeling as if she would suffocate from haste, heat, and the effect of the scare of Delia's danger.

"It certainly is warm, and we have been walking so long, too," answered Delia, who, not having realized her peril, had not been so much upset by it as her sister.

They took the way slower after that, and presently reached the place where the corduroy ended so abruptly; and, striking across the sand, they soon rounded the bluff and came upon Gertrude and Jessica, who were holding a council of ways and means, and looking very much disturbed as they talked.

A heap of letters and pamphlets lay beside Gertrude on the ground, but in her hand she was holding a flimsy

yellow envelope, which suggested a telegram, and the other things seemed to have received no notice at all.

"Why, what is the matter?" cried Marion. "You two look as solemn as owls. Has Douglas Amoyne turned up to claim his own, or has it been found that Uncle Joseph did leave a will after all?"

"It is not quite so important as that," replied Gertrude, who looked rather upset. "The wire is from Mme Delarey, and it says that she cannot come to us."

"We shall survive the blow, I really believe," said Marion, and suddenly realized that although she had been talking to Delia about the drawbacks of having money, it would have been something of a shock to hear that they were poor again.

"Doubtless we shall survive," Gertrude went on. "But, all the same, it makes our position rather difficult, for I had looked to Mme Delarey to chaperon us here."

"What for?" Marion looked round with a puzzled air, then shook her head and gave it up.

"The British Columbian Mrs. Grundy might object to our living alone in the wilds, and I have you young ones to think of," said Gertrude, while a little flush came into her cheeks. She hated to be laughed at, and certainly Marion was laughing now.

"Then let her object," said Marion quietly. "Look here, Gertrude, did anyone ever say a word about our living alone in those two rooms in Quebec? No one could possibly have been more unchaperoned than we were then, and that with all the perils of a great city about us. Yet we never came to harm, or deemed it other than perfectly natural that we should live alone."

"I suppose that no one troubled about us because we were so poor, and poor people have to live as they can," replied Gertrude. But her face had cleared already, for her own good sense told her that of the two this life in the

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wilds held far less need of a protector than that other life had done. If they had managed without a chaperon then, they certainly did not need one now.

"Very well," said Marion, who was in the mood to drive her arguments home; "to all intents and purposes we are poor people still, even though we happen to have a banking account and sufficient income to buy us food, clothes, and a few other things. There might any day come the news that these things were no longer ours, and then we should be of no concern to Mrs. Grundy, as she has no dealings with the poor. Oh, I think it is lovely that the little Frenchwoman has been kept from coming by the unforeseen circumstances, whatever they may be! Now we shall still be four, and not five, as we had feared—at least I had. But you shall trudge over to Poplar Ridge to-morrow, or I will go for you, and we will buy a dog, and a horse if we can get one. The dog can protect us at night far more effectually than Mme Delarey would have done, and the horse will do to ride. Ah me, there is good in most things, and I am entirely resigned!"

"And so am I," put in Delia in a tone of great satisfaction.

## CHAPTER VII

### Just Themselves

A WHOLE fortnight had gone by, and the girls were still alone at their camp at Clamping Bay. Mme Delarey had followed her telegram by a letter in which she stated that a fall on the stairs had resulted in an injury to her ankle, which would keep her a prisoner for weeks, although she was able to leave her bed and lie on the couch. She was sorry not to be able to come west and spend the weeks in camp with them; but even her deprivation had its compensations, for the daughter of her only brother had come into the city to live, and was sharing her apartment, and the little woman wrote that, after having been alone for so many years, it was like heaven to have a companion.

"Poor little woman!" exclaimed Gertrude, when she read the letter to the others. "If she is happy in not coming, I do not mind; but I could not bear to think of her being sad and alone in the city while we were enjoying this."

"Probably life in camp would have oppressed her sorely," said Marion; "and Bruno makes quite as effective a chaperon as ever Mme Delarey could have done."

Hearing his name mentioned, a shaggy dog rose to his feet, and, walking up to Marion, stuffed an affectionate nose into her hand. This was Bruno, a half-starved dog which they had found haunting the camp, stealing such things as it could find, and looking such a picture of hungry wistfulness that they had set themselves to work to

make friends with it, and had succeeded even beyond their expectations. The dog attached himself to the camp, and the next time the small boy on the big horse brought out the mail and a supply of bread from Poplar Ridge the animal flew at the intruders with so much savagery that Marion had to cast herself upon him and drag him off by sheer force.

"Why, I'm blest if you haven't got old Anthony Bream's dog!" exclaimed the boy in accents of amazement.

"Who is old Anthony Bream, and why should not his dog be here if it wants to?" asked Marion, who still kept her arms round the neck of the dog, which growled, and barked, and said things in dog language about what he would do to that horse and boy if only he got half a chance.

"Who was he, you mean?" corrected the boy. "He is dead now. Hung himself back in last winter—or was it the winter before? He used to live at that farm a mile back along the trail. And he wanted to get rich in a hurry, like so many more folks, so he put all his money into building lots at Poplar Ridge, because someone told him that the railway was coming up this way. Well, it didn't come, but went off out by Birch Lake and Stoney Valley, and it broke the old man's heart, so they said, though I think myself that something busted inside of his head, for he was such a nice old man that it is against common sense to believe he would do such a thing if he had stopped in his right mind. Anyhow, he did it, and this dog, Bruno, came howling into Poplar Ridge, same as if it knowed all about it, and it kept up such a racket outside the store that Mr. Wilberforce Washington, or, as we call him, W.W., sent a man along to Mr. Bream's place to see if something was wrong; and they found the poor old man strung up in the barn, and writ on a piece of paper that he had done it off his own bat, 'cos he was

afraid lest anybody might be falsely accused in the business."

"Oh, the poor old man!" said Marion, and the tears rose to her eyes. Then she squeezed the dog affectionately, and asked: "But what became of the dog afterwards?"

"Oh, he has just hung round, hunting, stealing, or going hungry! There are a good few critters on their own like that," replied the boy, who had dismounted, and was delivering his bread before turning out the mail.

"We are very thankful that Bruno has chosen to adopt us," said Gertrude, with a laugh, for the creature was still struggling to come at the boy and the horse. "But it would certainly be a comfort if he would not look on you as such a very dangerous person. What can we do to teach him better manners?"

"Oh, the critter would quiet down in a minute, miss, if you liked to shake hands with me," said the boy, but rather bashfully. The Amoyne girls were supposed to be very rich indeed, since they were able to live without working, and to spend their days in such a fashion; and as money was the only form of aristocracy known in that part of the world, the boy of course felt that he was in the presence of the most tiptop swells the Dominion could produce.

Gertrude and Marion burst out laughing, and each advanced upon the boy with outstretched hands, while Delia and Jessica, coming back from clam digging, and hearing what was in the wind, at once shook hands with the boy also, whereat Bruno was graciously pleased to cease growling, and even condescended to wag his stumpy tail in languid greeting of the arrival.

Nothing could possibly have fitted in with the ideas of the four girls better than this trait of the dog's to regard everyone as a bitter enemy with whom they did not shake

hands, for, as he was a dog of great strength, he would be no mean protection should undesirable characters ever come that way.

So much of happiness had come to the four in that one fortnight that they felt as if they would like to stay on the lonely shore until the autumn forced them to live in a house again. They had not had a holiday since the far-away days at Templeton; they had not had a day in the real country since they went to Quebec to live; so it was little wonder that the free, outdoor life was such a charm to them.

There were drawbacks to perfect happiness, of course, and one of the most pronounced inconveniences of their present mode of life was that they could get no one to wash their clothes.

It was not that the people of the district were averse to earning a few extra dollars, but the poor things were already so badly overworked that the thought of any outside thing like taking in washing was not to be endured for a moment.

However, the four had been compelled to make so many shifts in the days of their poverty that they were not so much upset by this inconvenience as girls might have been who had never experienced the salutary influences of very narrow means; and, because they could find no one to do it for them, they just set to work and washed their garments themselves. Of course it made them very economical in the matter of clean clothes; they also suffered a few pangs at the sight of each other in rough, washed blouses, until they bethought themselves to pay a visit to the store at Poplar Ridge, where they purchased a box iron. After that things went easily enough, for it was quite possible to make the heaters hot in a fire on the ground, and then the blouses at least could be smoothed over, so that the wearers looked and felt respectable.

The fact of not being able to have anything done for themselves brought their attention sharply to the fact of how hard driven the women of that neighbourhood must be; and after that it became a point of honour with them to do something every few days whereby the burdens might be lightened.

One day it would be Marion and Delia who would descend upon one of these overworked women, and, taking the household tasks between them, set the whole place in order, make bread or butter, bake a batch of cake, or do the ironing; then back to camp in the evening, well tired with the work, which, after all, was only another sort of play, seeing that they were in no way compelled to do the task.

Ah, but those evenings in camp—how delightful they were! Lounging in hammock chairs out in front of the tents, they would watch the sun go down and the moon come up, and then turn in for the night, to sleep absolutely undisturbed until morning. No need for any of them to worry about intruders now. And Gertrude had ceased to lie awake at night on watch, for they were quite certain that Bruno would give them timely warning of anything unusual which might be in the neighbourhood of the tents. The dog always lay at night just outside the opening of the sleeping tent; and so secure did they feel in his guardianship that, as the nights became hotter, they went to bed with the canvas of the front looped up, so that they could feel the breeze which stole in from across the water, and hear the tide ripple softly into the little pools as it crept in over the miles of sand.

Sometimes it would be Gertrude and Jessica who would go for a day to help the M'Whortles with the haying, and they would come back late in the evening hot and tired, to find supper ready, and a delicious smell of roast clams to salute them before they reached the tents.

Perhaps of all the pleasures of those weeks on the shore the clamming was the greatest fun. They would go a long way out on the sands at the ebb and dig for clams, getting so expert after a time that it was very easy work to keep themselves well provided with this delicacy.

It was only here and there along the coast at that part that clams could be found in such abundance; indeed, the name, Clamping Bay, came from the abundance of clams, and should by rights have been Clamming Bay, only it would not have come so trippingly from the tongue, and hence the change.

They were all four away on the sands one morning in mid-August, having left Bruno on guard at the tents. They had nearly filled their baskets, and were talking of going back to cook some of their clams for breakfast, when they heard a tremendous barking from the dog—a growling, angry noise, breaking off into sharp yelps of rage, and, after looking at each other for a moment in doubt and alarm, they turned homewards, scudding across the stretches of wet sand as fast as they could run. There were two fears distinct in the minds of each of them: one was that if the intruder were evilly minded he might do some harm to the dog, and the other was that Bruno might rend a friend nearly to bits from a mistaken sense of duty. The dog had such a strong character, and, unlike many humans, he was so faithful in his adherence that there was absolutely nothing that he would not have done to protect the property of his benefactors.

“He is getting quieter now,” gasped Gertrude, who was finding the pace rather trying. “Perhaps the arrival has gone away again.”

“Or else has retired up into the branches of that young butternut to await our coming home,” replied Marion, with a gurgle of laughter. “Remember what a comical figure of fun Giles Green cut last week when he came over with

our bread, and we were away on the sands. Oh, I shall not soon forget coming back to see him sitting up that tree and Bruno lying at the foot, to keep him from coming down!"

"But it was really the fault of Giles; he should not have meddled with our things, as he admitted having done," Gertrude answered a little severely. She and Marion had fallen rather behind the other two, for both Delia and Jessica could beat them in the matter of pace.

"Curiosity is a weakness not confined to our first mother, nor to the long line of her daughters," rejoined Marion, with a laugh. "But I thought that it showed great honesty in Giles to admit that he had tried to pry into what was plainly not his business. Oh, listen to the growling now! Think what fearful threats Bruno is making in dog language."

"Bad language, I suppose it would be called. Oh, my foot!" Gertrude cried out in pain. She had struck her foot against a sharp, saw-like shell, and the blood was flowing.

Down on the sands plumped Marion, and administered first aid of a rough-and-ready sort. It did not take long, but by the time they were moving forward again the other two had disappeared from view round the curve of the bluff, and the noise of Bruno's growling had died to silence.

"If it is visitors come to spend the day, I wonder what we can give them to eat?" said Gertrude, who was rather pale from the pain of her hurt, and not able to get along very fast.

"Roast clams and crackers, washed down with coffee. If that is not enough, they can return by the way they came," replied Marion, with a merry laugh. Hospitality never troubled her. She was quite willing to share what she had, and if that were not sufficient she declined to be bothered any further.

Gertrude, on the other hand, was very much of a Martha,

and always worrying to give her visitors of her very best. She was prepared to wear herself out in cooking when anyone chanced along for a meal, and would have taken life very hardly indeed if the others would have allowed her. But when by chance a wagonload of M'Whortles came bumping along the corduroy, or Mrs. Wilberforce Washington brought her children down to the shore, the younger girls declared that it was Gertrude's place to do the entertaining. Then the elder sister would be packed off to sit and talk to the visitors, while the children paddled and the three juniors made the best provision possible on the spur of the moment, and so the situation was saved.

Marion was supposing that something of this sort would have to be done this morning, and was groaning in private, for she was really tired, as she had been away haymaking with Jessica on the previous day at a farm that almost adjoined The Welcome Home, where poor old Anthony Bream had ended his life when poverty stared him in the face. Now, haying was very tiring work, and only to be endured philosophically when there was a prospect of entire rest next day.

Just as Marion was resigning herself to the inevitable, and making up her mind to wear as pleasant a face as possible over the business, Delia came running back to say that there was no one at the tents, and no sign of anyone having been there.

"A false alarm. What a blessing!" and Marion permitted herself a sigh of great content. Now she would be able to recline comfortably in a hammock chair with a piece of knitting which there was no need to hurry about finishing, and life would be a pleasure instead of a fag.

"But someone must have been here, or Bruno would not have made such a clamour," said Gertrude, as she limped over the last strip of loose sandy soil, and sank

down for a rest on a bit of rock which jutted out at a convenient angle.

"There are no cards on the hall table," remarked Jessica, puffing out her chest, and talking in the bombastic fashion which always made the others laugh. Even a little joke can provoke a lot of mirth when one is really happy, and it is not so much the quality of the humour as its spirit which calls for appreciation.

Now that they had all returned, Bruno made quite a ridiculous object of himself by way of expressing his satisfaction, and calling attention to his wisdom in having turned away a most undesirable visitor. To see the fuss the creature made one would have thought that a gang of burglars at the very least had arrived upon the scene and been put to flight by the determined stand that he had taken.

However, no one was particularly sorry to be back at the tents and resting, instead of miles away on the edge of the water, fishing for what they could find.

So they loafed through the hottest part of the day. They had tea very early, and Marion, with the two younger girls, set off for a long ramble on the shore, which was to last until supper. They even took Bruno with them this evening, as Gertrude's foot was too painful for her to attempt any more walking for that day. She remained at home on guard, and promised to have supper ready when they should return.

There had only been one or two slight showers since they had been at Clamping Bay, and no day had been really broken entirely by rain. But this afternoon long wispy clouds were beginning to show along the edge of the horizon, while the afternoon seemed to grow hotter and hotter, until even breathing seemed a difficulty.

Gertrude sat on the shady side of the day tent with a book on her lap, but she was not reading. She was watching the scenery that already was like a familiar

picture to her. Forest, rock, and sea, how beautiful they were! And could anything be finer than the wide stretches of sand, where the tide was slipping gently out?

"All the same, it would not be a desirable situation in a very wet season," she said, speaking aloud, and then was surprised by the sound of her own voice.

She had turned a little in her chair, and was noticing how smooth the rocks had worn at the back of the encampment; and she went on talking to herself, not heeding the fact this time that she spoke aloud, for a very unpleasant conviction was being borne in upon her: "Why, in a heavy rain—a tempest rain—the water gathering in those hollows up yonder would pour down here like a mill race. Well, it is most sincerely to be hoped that we shall not have such a rain for the next fortnight, or else we may have to do some wading."

The prospect made her uncomfortable, for surely those wispy clouds out yonder on the horizon meant rain. She wished very much that it had occurred to her to think about the wet before, and then they could have taken the tent down and pitched it afresh on a safer spot. It would not have been possible to have found one that was more convenient or picturesque, and of course in a slight rain no damage was to be feared; it was only a downpour that might work them mischief.

"Oh, it is silly to fret! I really think that prosperity is spoiling me," she said to herself. She fell to musing on a letter she had received from Mr. Carson, the Quebec solicitor, only a few days previously. She had written to him to ask about the possibility of the European tour which she so much desired for herself and the others. Perhaps she wanted it more than any of them, for Marion frankly did not want it, and the two younger girls did not care specially for chances of culture, although they cared very much for enjoying themselves after the manner of all

healthy young animals, from kittens upwards. Mr. Carson had written saying that he did not think there could be any reason why they should not go. He could not tell her definitely as yet how much their yearly income would be, for Mr. Joseph Amoyne's property had been left in a very muddled condition, so the Liverpool lawyers said. But there would certainly be money enough to warrant them travelling for a year, and it might even be desirable, for the final clearing up of her uncle's estate, that she should go to England herself.

"It will be just too delightful to see England again!" she murmured, with a very homesick sigh, yet realizing with acute pain that even the sight of home could not satisfy her homesickness, because, alas! the dear home-makers were gone, and would not return.

Then she started to her feet in a sudden fright as a long roll of thunder sounded among the hills, rumbling and rumbling until it finally died away in the distance.

"A thunderstorm! Oh dear, I hope it won't be a heavy one! And, oh, I do hope that the girls will soon be back!"

There was no sign of their return, however, although she limped out beyond the shadow cast by the bluff in order to get a wider view of the sands.

It was about time to start getting supper ready, however, and so she stepped into the day tent, and started on her preparations. But every few minutes she was moving to the opening of the tent to see if the storm were coming up fast, and also to look for any sign of the girls returning.

The kettle was boiling, the table was set for supper, and the eggs were beaten ready for a savoury omelet before the distant barking of Bruno warned her that the girls were not far away. She hurried her preparations then, and the omelet was almost ready for dishing before the three arrived, all of them declaring that they were just dead tired.

"There is going to be a thunderstorm, Gertrude. Don't you expect that we shall hear the thunder dreadfully out-of-doors?—I mean, that it will be much worse than if we were in a house." Jessica's face was pinched with fear as she spoke. She was the nervous one of the four when it came to storms, and they were all used to making light of them for her sake.

"It certainly won't make the windows rattle, so we shall be spared that discomfort," said Marion gravely. "Don't you remember, Jess, how that window at the end of yours and Gertrude's bed used to rattle when it stormed, and you used to cry and say that you would not mind a bit if only the window would not make such a dreadful noise?"

"I don't like a noise," answered Jessica, going rather pale, and looking so distressed that they had to comfort her somehow, for she was apt to make herself poorly from nervous strain. Although camp is very delightful for well people, it would be very awkward in case of sickness.

"If you feel as if you would like a roof over your head we can trot back along the trail to old Anthony Bream's Welcome Home," suggested Delia, who had her mouth so full of omelet that it made her have a tendency to mumble. "We shall just have time to get there, I fancy, though it will be rather lonesome if it storms all night."

"Oh no, I don't want to go there!" replied Jessica with very pronounced distaste.

"Let us make haste and get to bed then. I am most fearfully sleepy, and probably if we can get to sleep before the storm comes up we shall know nothing about it, except for the rattle of the rain on the canvas," said Delia; and there was so much wisdom in the suggestion that Gertrude and Marion sent the two juniors off to the sleeping tent the first minute that supper was over, while they remained behind to clear away and wash the dishes,

"Oh, we made a discovery when we were out on the sands this evening, and I am afraid that it will not prove a very pleasant one!" said Marion, as they moved quickly to and fro clearing up for the night.

"What discovery?" asked Gertrude.

The loud rumble of thunder made so much noise just then that Marion had to wait a minute before replying. When it had died away she said: "There is another camp about a mile to the north of us, and I am afraid that it is a man's camp. I mean, we did not see any women. There is only one tent, and we saw a man who looked quite young sitting on a chair outside."

"Dear me, that would be distinctly unpleasant!" exclaimed Gertrude, and a worried look came into her face; it was as if the thing which had been so delightful was suddenly crumpling up, so to speak, and showing discomforts and perplexities on every side.

"It might have been a person from that camp who came here to call this morning, and had such a noisy welcome from Bruno," suggested Marion, who had been frankly puzzled all day because the visitor had not been in evidence when they returned.

"Probably," agreed Gertrude. Then she said, with a tightening of her lips which made her look quite elderly: "Well, I hope that it will prove effectual in keeping the individual, whoever he was, from wanting to pay his respects in this direction again."

"Of course they might be nice people," said Marion.

"They might; but, on the other hand, we are not here for society, and, although we might have welcomed a woman with children, we should need to look very much askance at young men, however exceptional their standing, for remember we have no chaperon, and there are the two younger ones to think of."

Marion permitted herself a low laugh of pure amuse-

ment. "It is Uncle Joseph's miserable little bit of money which makes all the difference, and how stupid it is! Before we had it no one minded what we did, or what we said, or how we looked; we were absolutely of no importance. But now, because a poor old man who hated us was too careless to make a will, we suddenly become so precious that we need someone to look after us, and when we go among our fellows the conventions decree that we should have an old woman of some kind toddling after us, just to see that only the right people—the right from a monetary standpoint, of course—can gain access to us!"

"It sounds very silly, I know," murmured Gertrude, as if in apology for the conventions. She added, in a worried tone: "I am afraid that it is going to be a very bad storm to-night. I shall not undress until it is well over."

"Why not?" asked Marion in surprise. "Are you afraid that the rain will come through the sleeping tent? It ought not, you know, for we were especially careful to have one with a six-ounce filling for sleeping. Of course, this one may leak a little at the seams, because it was not so good. But if the rain comes very fast there will not be so much danger as in a steady, persistent rain."

"I am not so much afraid of it coming through as of it coming under and washing us from our moorings," replied Gertrude; and then she told Marion how she had discovered the traces of flood water having swept across the little hollow where the tents stood, with their background of forest-clad hills.

"Well, if we have to run for it, the best thing will be to make for The Welcome Home. We should at least have a roof over our heads there," said Marion. "Would you like to go before the storm comes up? Then there would be no fear of getting drenched."

But Gertrude shuddered in very real distaste at the mere suggestion of such a thing. "I think that I would really

rather stay here and get wet. I will confess that I have a morbid dislike of that lone place. I always was afraid of empty houses; they affect me much in the same way that a dead body does. The souls are lacking. Are you quite ready for bed now? How dark it is! The days are certainly getting shorter, and, of course, the stormclouds would make it darker to-night."

There was a loud crash of thunder as they stepped out from the day tent to cross over to the sleeping tent. But both of them were relieved when they went inside to find that Delia and Jessica were fast asleep.

"What a comfort!" murmured Gertrude. "Perhaps they will not wake until morning."

"I am sure that I shall not," replied Marion, with a tremendous yawn. "I am almost asleep already."

Gertrude was tired also, and in spite of the noise of the thunder she was soon fast asleep.

Then a wild blast of wind roared round the hills and bowed the forest trees. The lightning zigzagged up and down, the thunder crashed again, and the incoming tide, feeling the influence of the wind, rolled up in waves, striking the sand with a hissing noise, and rolling in higher and higher.

Then the rain came down with a roar. It was like the opening of a dam, and, because the earth was too dry for it to soak in, it ran off the hard surface, gathering strength and volume as it rushed downhill, and finally emptying in a great cascade into that pleasant hollow where the tents had been pitched. Gertrude awoke with a start at the sound of a cry, and at that moment something snapped sharply, the heavy canvas descended on her face, her bed crumpled under her, and she was lying in the water, with the canvas pressing her down in a suffocating fashion.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A Wild Night

THE two younger girls were shrieking wildly, and for them Gertrude felt no particular concern, because if they could shriek it was proof positive that they were not in such a bad way. But Marion made no sound at all, and it was her silence that frightened Gertrude very badly.

"Marion, Marion!" she called in urgent tones. "Are you hurt, dear?"

"Where is Marion, and oh, I say, Gertrude, what has happened to us? I am being smashed and drowned at the same time!" cried Delia.

"I am in the water too, and I feel as if I should be choked, and Gertrude, Gertrude, listen to the rain!" called Jessica. Yet although both of them shouted their very loudest, their voices only came dimly as it were to Gertrude, so great was the tumult of the elements just then.

"Marion, Marion!" called Gertrude in growing dismay, for what could have happened to the breezy practical second sister who was always so ready in any emergency?

"All right, don't be frightened, I will get you out as soon as I can!" shouted a voice from somewhere, only it was a strange voice, and it had, moreover, a masculine ring.

The knowledge that help was near calmed the two younger girls, who left off shrieking in terror, although they called out incessantly to know where Marion was, and to ask what had happened, although as a matter of

fact the nature of the calamity was quite unpleasantly obvious. The tent pole had snapped from the pressure of the wind, perhaps some of the cords had given way at the same time, and the tent had fallen in upon them; the beds had collapsed from the strain, and they were all mixed up on the ground with clothes, furniture, and the wreckage of the collapsed tent.

But who was the someone who had come to their rescue? That, at least, was a question which no one could answer at the present moment. Indeed, they all had too much to do in trying to get clear of the ruins to spend much thought on the identity of the man who was making such energetic endeavours to help them.

Gertrude was leaving it to the man outside to get the canvas off, and to set them free; she was engaged in trying to reach the spot where Marion must be lying. She had often heard of tents collapsing, but she did not remember ever having heard of people being killed by the fall of the canvas, and so she tried to comfort herself on Marion's account.

"They are *my* feet!" shrieked Delia, as Gertrude, coming upon what appeared to be a strange pair of feet, tugged at them in the hope of finding Marion.

"I did not mean to hurt you, dear, but I am trying so hard to find Marion," said Gertrude, and now there was so much trouble in her tone that Delia tried to turn comforter.

"Perhaps she is already outside, helping that strange somebody to rescue us. Oh dear, I am so mixed up that I feel as if I should just suffocate!" gasped Delia. She wriggled and wriggled until she found the edge of the canvas, and, tearing it up by sheer force of arm, she poked her head out to the wet and the storm to get a deep breath of fresh air,

"There is Marion!" she shrieked, as a blaze of lightning illumined the black darkness for a moment, revealing Marion on the other side of the collapsed tent, trying to lift it up so that those imprisoned inside could get out. She was being helped in this by a man clad in a long oil-skin coat. But they dropped their side of the tent on hearing Delia's shout, and came running round to help her to get clear, and to hold up the heavy wet canvas until Gertrude could help Jessica to get out also.

"What is that noise?" asked Gertrude, directly her head was free from the enfolding canvas.

"Clang, clang, clangety clang!" A bell was sounding mournfully above the roar of the rain and the howling of the wind, and for the first moment she really thought that she must be dreaming, for where could a bell come from?

"There is a vessel in distress out there somewhere," said the stranger who had come so opportunely to their help. He was drawing them into the shelter of the little tent which had been designed for the use of Mme Delarey, and as she had not come had been used as a store-room ever since.

The day tent was flat, like the sleeping tent—with this difference, that a stream of water was pouring over and round and under it, until it looked as if they had pitched their camp in the bed of the river.

"A vessel in distress, did you say? How very dreadful! Can we do something to help them, I wonder?" said Gertrude, mindful of her own extremity a few short months ago.

"I am going to see if anything can be done, now that you are all safely out. You are all out from the tent, are you not?" asked the stranger anxiously. He had thrust them all one after the other inside the tiny store-tent, where there was barely standing room, but of course anything was better than being exposed to the rain, which was coming down in a perfect deluge.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

"Yes, we are all four of us here," replied Gertrude, grabbing at the three others in turn to make absolutely sure that she had them all safely. "We are very, very much obliged to you for helping us. I cannot think how the tent collapsed, for we thought that it was pitched so well, and it had stood for weeks without accident."

"Oh, this is a night to try the strongest tent that was ever made!" answered the stranger. There was that in his accent which puzzled Gertrude, for he did not talk like a colonial. He lacked the intonation of the Canadian, which is distinctive and not to be mistaken; but he also did not talk like an Englishman. For the present she left off thinking about it, and turned her attention instead to what he was saying.

"My own tent collapsed like a paper bag that has been blown up and burst. That was at the very first of the storm, and I was wondering where I should spend the night, when I heard that mournful bell tolling and tolling; so I set out along the shore, because I had got it into my head that you might be in trouble at your camp, and were ringing for help."

"We have no bell," put in Gertrude quickly.

"Well, that one served you well at any rate, for I had just reached here when the first tent collapsed, and before I could get my breath for a shout the other one went too, and I had just pulled one of you clear of the ruins when some more began screaming."

"I was in a bad way," said Marion, with a shudder, for her plight had been really serious. "I should certainly have been choked if someone had not speedily come to my help, for the cord had tightened across my neck; I could not struggle nor cry."

"I am glad that I came in time to help," the stranger answered politely. As the bell kept up its insistent clamour, he went on hurriedly: "And now, if you do not

need anything more for the moment, I will go and see if I can manage to help the folks on board that vessel. Hallo! why, here it is!

They all turned out of the tent in a great hurry at the exclamation; but at that moment darkness shut down upon them, and there was only the streaming rain descending on them, while they could not see their hands when they held them up. It had not been so dark ten minutes ago, but the storm seemed to be coming back again, and the air was full of the roar of the wind and rain.

"Where—where is it?" cried Gertrude with dismay, for the tolling bell seemed so very near, yet how could any vessel come up over those shallow sands?

"She is over there, just rounding the bluff—a sailing boat she seemed to be. When the lightning comes again, you will be able to see her. Ah, look, she has struck and heeled over!"

The lightning was a blaze of rose colour this time, and by its glare they saw the hull of a vessel close to the bluff. Then they all cried out in dismay, for the tide was running so high that the waves were washing their feet, and if it came any higher the tents and all their other effects would be carried away.

The young man had dashed off into the gloom to see if he could be of any use to the people on the stranded boat, though how he would reach them it was difficult to imagine. Meanwhile the bell kept tolling and tolling with a solemn insistent sound which thrilled them all with awe and fear.

"We must move the things or we shall lose them all!" cried Marion shrilly. She was feeling that action of any kind would be preferable to standing still listening to that bell tolling and tolling as if in requiem for a drowned crew.

"Dear, it is too dark to stir, and what could we do in this downpour?" Gertrude's voice was calm and quiet, for it would never do to let the young ones take panic,

and there was only discomfort instead of actual danger to be faced.

"It is time for the tide to turn, I believe, and we have never seen it as high as this," said Delia, who had drawn Jessica back to the shelter of the tent. Although they were all very wet, it did not seem worth while to get any wetter by standing out in the downpour, which still showed no sign of abating, although the thunder was dying away and the lightning was less vivid.

What a night it was! And they could do simply nothing but stand grouped in the entrance of that little tent, expecting that it would collapse every moment. Gertrude had remembered that some spare rugs were there, and groping for them in the dark, she had succeeded in finding four. These wrapped round their damp clothes kept them from feeling the chill of the night.

"It is strange that this little tent should be the only one to stand, when it is such a cheap little thing compared with the others," said Marion, after a blast which threatened to take the tent away bodily, yet passed leaving it unharmed.

"It is so small compared with the others, and that is where the secret of its safety lies, I expect," said Gertrude, who was making Jessica lean close to her out of the force of the wind. None of them dared to sit down, for the water came up round their ankles. They were momentarily expecting the tent to be blown over, and one experience of lying under a collapsed tent was enough to last them for that night at least. Yet a shelter they must have, and so they stood just under cover, prepared to take flight at the very first sound of the tent pole snapping.

But, strangely enough, the little tent withstood the storm. The wind gradually dropped, and presently, after what seemed the longest night they ever remembered, a grey tinge stole across the darkness, and they realized that dawn had come.

"Oh, what a blessed relief!" cried Marion, with a sob. She had been very quiet during the last hour, or what they supposed to be the last hour, for, of course, no one had any matches, nor any means of telling the time.

"I believe that I have been to sleep. Can people go to sleep when they are standing on their feet?" asked Jessica in a drowsy tone. She had been fairly warm and comfortable since Gertrude had found the rug for her, and, although she was standing ankle-deep in water, it had not seemed to matter very much.

"I don't know about people, but horses as often sleep standing up as lying down," answered Delia. She added, as an afterthought: "But they wear out dreadfully quickly that way, and I suppose you would too."

"There is the ship!" cried Marion. "I can see her masts sticking up over the bluff. I am going to see how she lies." She started off, followed by the other three.

The bell was clanging only fitfully now, just as if the boat were being gently rocked to and fro, and with the coming of daylight it had lost its weird sound and was only an ordinary bell ringing in a very commonplace manner—such a difference does daylight make to things of dread.

"Oh, what a sight!" cried Gertrude, and the others echoed the cry. Instead of the noiseless tide which had been wont to roll in over the wide stretches of sand there was a raging, angry sea, with billows mountains high. These came rolling in and breaking with a thunderous noise, throwing up clouds of spray. The bluff, which had been high above full tide, stood out like a cliff at sea with the water surging round it; and driven close inshore, jammed tightly upon the big boulders that fringed the edge of the sand, lay what appeared to be a schooner, slightly tilted on her side. She was a piteous-looking

object, with her sails torn to rags, her masts snapped off short, and her rigging trailing over the side, a confusion of broken spars and fluttering rags of sailcloth.

"Oh, what a sight!" gasped Jessica. "Where are the people who were ringing for help all night?" She felt that this was seeing life with a vengeance, for never, never had she stood so closely on the fringe of a real adventure before.

"I wonder where the man is who came to help us and then went off to help the people on the boat!" said Gertrude, with anxiety lest harm had come to him, for surely it would be very easy for anyone to happen upon misadventure at a time like this.

"Why, there he is on board the boat!" cried Marion. "At least I suppose that it is he. I know he had some sort of shiny mackintosh coat, for I saw it when the lightning was so strong. But I wonder how ever he managed to get on to the boat, and where are the other people?"

She might well ask that question, for the figure of the man was solitary amid the confusion of wreckage. He was shouting to them, only they could not hear what it was he said.

"I believe that he wants us to go to him on board, only the puzzle will be how to get there," said Delia.

"We cannot go, of course. It is quite out of the question," said Gertrude. Her tone was sharper than ordinary, for the disasters of the night had tried her dreadfully. She was wet, cold, and miserable, and would have been thankful indeed just then for the shelter of a roof and the chance of a breakfast that would be hot and comforting.

"Here, hi, hallo!" shouted the man on board the boat. He was gesticulating furiously, and beckoning them to come.

"I think we could manage to climb over those rocks round the other side; at least we can try," said Marion.

But Gertrude hesitated still. The utmost visible danger

would apparently be wet feet; but then they were so very damp already that it did not seem likely that a little more would make any very great difference.

"Oh, Gertrude, do let us go! Just think, there may be some poor creature on board who needs our help!" cried Jessica.

This view of things being so eminently reasonable, Gertrude moved forward towards the boat, closely followed by the other three. They slipped and splashed into the pools of water in the hollows fringing the shore. But the tide was ebbing swiftly now, and in a couple of hours the boat would be stranded high and dry. Even now it would be only a matter of splashing through shallow water to get to the tangle of ropes and spars, by means of which they could reach the sloping deck, where their helper of the night was standing.

He was shouting to them still, only at first they could not hear what he was saying. But when they stopped a moment to listen he began all over again.

"Please come on board. There is not a soul here except myself, for the boat has been deserted. I have got a fire going down in the cabin, and we can have breakfast dry and warm. Think what it will mean to us after all that we have had to endure through the night!"

"What indeed!" murmured Gertrude, with actual tears of thankfulness in her eyes, for she was so very hungry and cold and miserable.

"How truly delightful!" cried Delia. "Whoever would have thought when we turned in last night that we were going to have a breakfast invitation for the morning? Come along! I will lead the way, for I can see just where is the best place to climb."

She raced across the short space of boulder-strewn shore, and plunging boldly into the water, she caught at the tangle of ropes, and began to pull herself up by them.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

Jessica was close behind, and thoroughly entering into the fun of the thing now that she knew there were no suffering people on board, no one in need of succour or sympathy. Her happy laugh rang out, to be echoed by Marion, who was slipping and floundering behind, while Gertrude brought up the rear, feeling as if it must all be a dream, although the wet, and cold, and the ruin of the storm had been real enough.

Bruno pressed close to her side, as if he thought that his protection might be necessary, and he whined in acute distress as he saw that she was going to climb on to the swaying ropes, which Marion was trying to hold steady for her.

"Could you make that dog of yours understand that my intentions are strictly honourable, if you please?" asked the stranger, lifting his cap in courteous salute as Marion and Gertrude came scrambling up the rigging. "The creature wanted to do for me the other day when I was passing your camp and tried to make a friendly call. Devotion to an employer's interests may be carried too far when it is not tempered with discretion—don't you think so?"

"Of course, and I am very sorry that you had such bad treatment at Bruno's hands, or, rather, from his tongue," said Gertrude, with a laugh, as the stranger gripped her hand and drew her safely on deck. "But you will have no more trouble from him, for he never interferes with the people with whom he sees us shaking hands, and, as you have taken us all by the hand in turn, he quite understands that relations are established on a friendly basis. Go back and guard the tents, Bruno, old fellow, we shall not be long."

The dog turned, as if it quite understood, and went off back round the curve of the bluff, which hid the camping place from sight.

"Now, come to breakfast!" exclaimed the stranger. The hospitable air with which he ushered them into the tiny cabin made Marion laugh aloud, for, after all, it was not his boat nor his breakfast to which he was so urgently inviting them.

The cabin was a poky place, and not too clean, but there was a glowing fire in the stove, and the coffee-pot was sending out an appetizing odour. The floor was tilted at a most uncomfortable angle, and the table stood so much aslant that it was difficult to keep things in place upon it; but these were minor drawbacks, and mattered not at all to the four who were so pressingly in need of food and warmth.

"I have not managed to find any bread, but there is a big box of biscuit, and I have opened a tin of corned beef, so that we can have a satisfying feed even if the fare is not very dainty," said their host, as he showed them safe places in which to sit—that is to say, where sitting was possible, for, the angle being so acute on one side of the cabin, the bunks shot them forward when they tried to sit down.

"It is a really funny business," resumed the stranger, who was a young man, rather countrified in appearance, although not in speech. "There is no sign of the crew having taken to the boats, for the only boat there is hangs in its place still. The fire in the stove was laid ready for lighting, which was fortunate for me, as I was able to get it started without any trouble. The provisions seem to be better than what are usually supplied on boats of this class, and everything is in first-class order, except for the damage outside that has been wrought by the storm."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Gertrude, who was already beginning to feel better, thanks to the reviving influences of hot coffee and corned beef.

"I just hope that I am going to make some money out

of it!" he answered with great vigour. "I thought it all out while I was getting breakfast, and I am going to ask your help, for it is plain to see that I cannot do much in the business alone. Of course, as I was first on board, I can claim salvage, if I set out to give notice straight away. But if I set off and leave the boat with no one in charge, who is to say that someone else will not discover it in about two hours' time? and if they can make out a clearer case than mine I am done, you see. Now, the nearest place on the coast where I can report my find is Stuart Point, and that is twenty miles away, so I make it, and the road is not the sort over which anyone can sprint in a great hurry. I reckon it will take me from now to dark to reach it; so it will doubtless be to-morrow afternoon before the salvage officer arrives to take over the boat. Would you mind living on board until he comes?"

"Oh, we should love it!" cried Jessica. "It would be like having a yacht of our own, or at least we could pretend that it was our own. Oh, Gertrude, do let us stay here!"

"It would really be a good idea, for the two young ones would be dry and warm while we sort up our tents and rescue our belongings," put in Marion soberly. But her eyes were shining with glee at the prospect, and Gertrude herself thought the idea a really good one, for she had been not a little worried on Jessica's account, because of the wet and cold to which the little girl had been subjected during the last few hours.

"You think that there is no danger of the boat floating on the next tide?" she asked, turning to the stranger, who had been regarding her intently. She was so evidently the sister in authority that he guessed everything must hang upon her decision.

"Not the slightest," he answered promptly. "We are not likely to have such a high tide again for some time,

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and then it came in conjunction with that tremendous wind, you see. But I will run out a rope or two and moor her to the bluff; then you will be as safe as if you were sailing in 'a painted ship upon a painted ocean'." He laughed at his quotation as if he had made a rich joke.

"Then we will guard your find for you," Gertrude answered. She added in a doubtful tone: "What shall we do if the right people happen along? You say that the crew did not take to the boat, so what could have come to them? Do ships ever run away like horses, or even railroad cars?"

"Not very often, I think," he replied, shaking his head. He hurried away to moor them to the bluff, and to do what he could to ensure their comfort. It was half an hour before he came back, and then he told them that it was still raining heavily, but that there were signs of the weather clearing up later on. So he advised them to stay where they were for the next two or three hours, until it became really fine again. They would get a good rest after the fatigues of the night, and the tents could not by any possibility get any wetter, while the things inside which were dry would keep so. He told them, too, that Bruno was quite comfortable, and was making a hearty meal from a ham bone which he had taken him from the cabin stores.

"What do you expect the owners will say to you for taking their provisions to feed our dog?" asked Gertrude.

"They will be so glad to find that the whole concern has not been carried away piecemeal that I guess they will not have much to say about a ham bone," he answered. His jolly laugh echoed through the stuffy little cabin, the others joining in his merriment.

"I am so sorry that you will have such a tremendous walk," said Gertrude when he bade them goodbye, with another word of fervent thanks for their kindness in coming to his assistance,

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"If the tide is out I may not have to walk all the way. I have a bicycle at my camp, one of the old boneshaker pattern, but it does as well for the sands as a more ornate machine, and I shall go to fetch it. It may delay me half an hour at the first, but I shall gain so much by it later on that it will be quite worth while. Good morning! I shall hope to relieve you some time to-morrow afternoon."

He went off in a great hurry then, and it was not until they had watched him disappearing round the bluff in the direction of his camp that they recollected that they did not know what his name was, and he did not know theirs. Not that the latter mattered at all, but it was rather awkward that they had forgotten to ask him for his, as in the event of the salvage officer arriving first they would not know, save by describing him, who it was that should gain the reward.

"At least it looked very nice of him not to be thrusting himself and his concerns upon us. And it was really good taste in him not to be demanding who we were," said Marion sleepily.

"Oh, and was it not sweet of him to get this fire for us, and the breakfast!" chimed in Delia, who was curled up in a corner near the stove, looking sleepy and comfortable.

"We are all thankful for that, and also for the help last night," replied Gertrude; "but it was really stupid to forget to ask his name. However, we must make the best of it, and I hope he will have a good journey and get the payment from the salvage people. I suppose he is poor, as he seemed very keen on getting the reward. I hope it will be something worth having, especially as he has to go so far to give his information."

"They do pay very well indeed for salvage business. So Mrs. M'Whortle told me," said Marion. "She said that, until there was reasonable payment, when a boat came ashore anywhere along this coast it was promptly

looted and everything stealable was removed before ever the authorities had any idea there was anything to salve."

"Just so. May the errand of the unknown speed to a successful finish!" said Gertrude in a sleepy tone. Then silence fell over the group of girls in the hot stuffy cabin.

While they slept the clouds began to break, showing long streaks of blue, a brisk wind got up, the sun came out, and the world began to look cheerful once more.

Bruno, having breakfasted most luxuriously on that very tasty ham bone, had buried the remains for future consumption, and was dozing comfortably with one eye open: for well the faithful creature knew that he was on guard, and though he might have wondered why no one came to sort out the confusion caused by the storm of last night, it was not his to reason why, and so he slept in peace.

Just about noon, however, Gertrude awoke with a start, and wondered mightily where she was. A broad ray of sunshine streamed in through the dusty glass of the porthole, and the sight of it brought back her wandering senses, making her remember all the crowding events of the past night and early morning.

She sprang up with a clatter then, for the tents must be pitched anew, and there were only two of them to do anything now, seeing that she had promised that they would not leave the boat until the stranger returned. Stay, one might do if Bruno were on guard anywhere near at hand. Only in that case it must not be Jessica, who would certainly be nearly startled out of her wits if a rat chanced to run across the cabin floor.

"Wake up, wake up, the sun is shining!" she cried. Marion stirred drowsily and stretched herself.

"Time to get up?" she asked regretfully, then suddenly started into brisk wakefulness. "Oh, I remember, we are out for a voyage on dry land, a short cruise as a variant to camping, especially pleasant just now when the tents have

collapsed! Open your eyes, Delia, for if you were really asleep you would not snore in such a fearfully unnatural manner. And, Jessica, there is the cutest little lantern I ever saw hanging up yonder. Would it be stealing to annex it, do you expect? We want another lantern rather badly in camp."

"Hurry, hurry!" exclaimed Gertrude. "Remember all the ruin we have got to sort up. Oh dear, to think that we have wasted so much sunshiny weather in sleep!" She was putting herself as tidy as the limited accommodation permitted before turning out.

"I am all ready," replied Marion, with another yawn. "By the way, that man must have thought that we looked miserable objects when he rescued us last night. I am sure that I must have resembled an Indian on the war-path when he assisted me from under that canvas, and I was yelling too. It is really mortifying to think that one has ever looked such an object in the eyes of a stranger."

"But it was too dark to see what one looked like," answered Gertrude soothingly, although part of the soothing was meant for herself, for she had winced many times during those hours since the disaster in reflecting on what an object of pity she must have looked.

"Oh, kindly dark!" cried Marion with a melodramatic air. She hurried to let some fresh air into the stuffy cabin, after which, leaving Delia and Jessica on the boat for the present, the two seniors let themselves down by the tangle of ropes and spars and were soon on the sand. The schooner lay high and dry now, although as the tide was running in again she would doubtless be surrounded with water before long.

"It is really a cruise on dry land," laughed Gertrude. Then they ran across to their camping place round the other side of the bluff and set to work to repair the ruin wrought by the storm,

Bruno woke up and came to greet them, making quite a ridiculous fuss, just as if they had been away for a long time. He walked round the collapsed tents with them and appeared to enter into the difficulties of the situation with so much interest that they could not help laughing at him, and of course they immediately began to feel more cheerful in consequence.

But it took hours of hard work to get things even fairly straight. Leaving Bruno still on guard, they went back to the schooner for tea. This was a substantial meal to-night, because they had had nothing since the early breakfast, and they were all very hungry indeed.

Over tea they discussed their plans for the night, and decided to sleep afloat, or at least on the boat, though, as Marion remarked, there was not much of floating in it, seeing that the craft lay firmly wedged on the boulders, as awkward and ungainly as a ship ashore must always look.

"Bruno will take care of the tents for us, and we can be very snug here," said Gertrude, with a sigh of relief. So many things were wet at the tents that it was really a good thing they had this refuge to which they might retire.

"You are quite certain that the ropes are fast?" asked Marion a little anxiously. "Personally, though I have not the slightest objection to a short stay on shipboard while the ship remains ashore, I have no desire to be carried to the ends of the earth, or rather the ocean, in a craft which has no crew."

"We should have to write our adventures," laughed Delia, "and the book would sell like hot cakes, and everyone would want to see us when we came back." She had been doing so much rummaging on board that she had quite a nautical feeling, and would have felt equal to sailing the schooner herself if only she had had some sort of a guide to knowledge to tell her the names of the different ropes and spars, and instruct her in a few other things.

Now that they were rested and recovered from the confusion and dismay of the previous night, they had time to observe their surroundings more closely, and they were all disgusted at the dirt and grime of the stuffy little cabin. Yet it had been a real shelter to them last night, or rather this morning, and they were not going to be too fussily particular this evening. But, as Marion said, there was no sense in inviting more discomfort than was necessary. They carefully collected the cushions from the lockers of the cabin and stowed them in a heap out of the way. Bare boards might be hard and uncomfortable to sleep upon, but there were worse things, and it was these worse things they were so anxious to avoid.

The night passed without incident, and the morning dawned with bright sunshine. Everything was looking so fresh after the storm that the girls were longing to be off on some exploring expedition along the coast. But they had to stay by the derelict until they could be relieved. So the day had to be divided into watches, Gertrude and Jessica staying on board in the morning, while the others went away for a stroll inland. Then it was Marion and Delia who remained on the boat in the afternoon, while the other two went off duty.

Night fell, and no one came. They sat on the steep slope of the deck watching until darkness had fallen, and then turned in upon bare boards again, wondering what had happened to delay the journey of the stranger whose rights they were guarding.

## CHAPTER IX

### A Surprise

THE tide was high next morning when they awoke, and, as they would not have far to go for their morning dip, or, as Marion called it, their morning wallow, the four decided that they might as well all bathe together. So they lighted the fire in the cabin stove, and, setting a kettle on to boil, scrambled overboard and went down into the water at a run.

Right up to the vessel the tide was running, and the little waves were all a-shimmer in the morning light.

Disporting themselves like mermaids, the girls were swimming to and fro and laughing merrily, when Marion, farther out from the shore than the others, suddenly cried out that there was a steamer in the offing, for she had caught sight of a long trail of smoke against the clear blue of the morning sky.

They all scurried out of the water in a great hurry then, and, drying themselves hastily, were clothed and tidy before the steamer dropped her anchor.

"They have not lowered a boat yet, so I propose that we have our breakfast while we can get it in peace," said Gertrude. As they were all very hungry, this plan found instant favour with them.

But it was a very scrambled feast, and it was taken, not standing, but running about, for there were many of their own private and personal effects which had to be removed before the salvage officers arrived to claim the derelict.

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A boat was coming from the steamer now, and Delia, who was the long-sighted one of the four, stood on the steep slant of the deck trying to identify the men who were rowing inshore.

"Our noble rescuer is not among that lot," she announced presently.

"Are you quite sure?" asked Jessica, in such deep disappointment that the others could not help laughing at her.

"Quite; unless, indeed, he is wearing false whiskers, for everyone on that boat has bushy side whiskers. Ah, yes, and they are quite elderly to look at! I wonder what has happened, and why our gallant rescuer did not come back with the other men?"

"Perhaps these are not the salvage people," said Gertrude, "but merely a passing steamer that has sighted the derelict. You see, she would be visible a long way out at sea."

"In that case it is a mercy that we are able to be here to maintain the prior rights of the other man," said Marion. "They do not look a very pleasant lot, so I hope that we are not going to have trouble."

"So do I," answered Gertrude nervously. "I could find it in my heart to wish that we had not been forced into a situation so unpleasant, but we could scarcely refuse to help a man who had helped us, and we were really in a very desperate plight."

"We must just make the best of it," Marion said in a consoling fashion. She had a very understanding mind where Gertrude was concerned, and in some things she often appeared to be the elder of the two.

They stood and waited while the men rowed in close enough to hail them. But the tide was running out, and so the little boat could not get near the derelict. The men had to jump into the water and wade ashore, leaving one of their number in the boat.

The four girls were standing in a cluster on deck, hanging on to the middle of the rigging to maintain an upright position: but they all tried to look as imposing as possible, and to avoid all appearance of being afraid, although it goes without saying that every one of the four was quaking horribly.

"Good morning!" said Gertrude with dignity, as three men came splashing through the water, everyone of them staring at the group of girls as if he wished that he had three pairs of eyes to see with.

"Good morning, miss!" returned the biggest of the three men in an explosive tone, while his companions brought their hands to their foreheads in a stiff salute. Then the big man asked gruffly: "What are you doing up there?"

"We are taking care of the boat for the person who found it ashore, and who has gone to warn the salvage people," said Gertrude. She leaned forward, swaying a little, for the tilt of the deck made it extremely awkward to stand upon.

"What was the person's name, if you please, miss?" asked the man, with a lumbering attempt at politeness which sat upon him as gracefully as the accoutrements of a war-horse would upon a cow.

Gertrude smiled broadly, and the others smiled also, for certainly the situation had its comic side. Then she said quietly: "We do not know his name, but he was going to the salvage people, riding on a bicycle of an old-fashioned make, and he wore a very shiny oilskin coat."

"Ah, that would be the other fellow, the one who came just before we set off!" said the big man, turning to his companions, who had halted a step behind him.

They nodded by way of reply, and then the big man addressed Gertrude once more.

"We are salvage men, miss, and word was brought to us of a vessel ashore in Clamping Bay yesterday by Captain

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Jones of the Cannery Fleet. He told us she was pitched up on the shore, but, being too shorthanded to spare a man to watch her for him, he just had to come on to Stuart Bay, and trust to his luck in being first to give information. He was the first, as it happened, and we was just going to board the tug to come and claim her when a young chap rode up on a boneshaker bicycle to tell us about a derelict that he had found in Clamping Bay, so we had to tell him that his noos was ancient history, and we was off to take possession."

"Then we have just been staying here for nothing!" exclaimed Gertrude, with considerable chagrin in her tone.

"Well, I would not go so far, miss, for of course you have had board and lodging free, and provisions as far as they would go, I make no doubt," rejoined the big man, with the air of having said something delightfully humorous.

"As to that, we are perfectly able and willing to pay for what we have used," replied Gertrude, with such an accession of haughtiness that the big man immediately grew more respectful, even apologetic.

"Oh, as to that, you are highly welcome, and it is we who are in your debt for guarding the salvage for us! Nice little craft, ain't she, miss? The wonder to me is that she pitched ashore just so; but things are queer in seafaring matters."

He had come aboard by this time, and was overhauling the boat with the eye of an expert. Then he proceeded to cross-question Gertrude as to the manner of the vessel being found, expressing considerable surprise that it should have been deserted.

"The things that happen at sea are beyond understanding," he said, with a solemn shake of his head. "I remember years ago being able seaman aboard a ship what sailed in European waters, and we found a vessel one day what

was deserted. Calm weather it was, and she had never a sign of damage anywhere. Her boats hung from the davits; not one of them was missing. There was a sewing-machine in the captain's cabin, and a child's frock tossed down by the side of it. There was a meal spread on the table, and the food half-eaten on the plates, but there was nothing to show us why the people got up and left that meal, and left the ship as well; and, though years have passed since then, no one has ever found the clue to that vessel being deserted."

"Oh, how very strange!" cried Gertrude. "But do you think that there is the same sort of mystery here?"

"Well, since you ask me, no, I don't," he answered. He swung his hand in signal to his mates to come aboard. "Still, it seems queer for a crew to desert a boat in calm weather, as you may say, for you could not call that little blow we had the other night real dirty weather. I should be more inclined to think she had got adrift. Slipped her anchor, perhaps, and then was blown inshore here—wind, tide, and currents all setting this way."

"Then, of course, seeing that you are here to take over responsibility, there is no need for us to stay any longer," said Gertrude, who was feeling rather sad for the unknown man who had taken so much trouble for nothing.

"No need at all, thank you, miss, and we are very much obliged to you and the other young ladies for looking after the schooner. There have been times in plenty in the days that are gone when we might have found a vessel pretty well stripped by this time. But there don't appear to have been any damage done here."

"There has been nothing taken away, if that is what you mean," said Gertrude. Again there was such a haughty tone in her voice that the big man's hand went to his hat in a nervous sort of salute, as he replied hurriedly:

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"Just so, miss, just so; and we are very much obliged, me and my mates."

At this reference to themselves the other men saluted again, and then stood immovable as wooden dolls, while the girls collected their few effects and prepared to depart.

"Just help the ladies. Step lively, will you!" commanded the big man, as Marion, who essayed to climb down first, missed her footing, and came ignominiously near to a fall.

One of the men scrambled down with the agility of a monkey, and taking hold of Jessica swung her down, setting her on the sand before she had time to realize what was going to happen; then Delia was promptly grasped in a similar manner; and Gertrude, having to choose between being helped in the same fashion or scrambling awkwardly down with three pairs of eyes watching her struggles for safe footing, decided that it was easier, and on the whole more dignified, to let the man swing her down, and in consequence reached the ground with the minimum of trouble and difficulty.

"Well, it is a comfort to be out of that," said Marion when they reached the tents once more, and had been rapturously greeted by Bruno.

"I am so vexed that we ever undertook to stay on the boat," answered Gertrude. "And yet it would have been horrid to refuse to do a kindness. I think that young man was very poor, or he would not have been so keen on getting the reward from the salvage people."

"And, having been poor before, we of all people are most able to understand how it feels," said Marion, shrugging her shoulders. Then she asked anxiously: "But what about those tents, standing as they do? Are we not in danger of another wash-out if a storm comes up?"

"I have been thinking about that, and I fancy that we shall be all right if we dig a trench across the end of the

two tents, and so divert the water to one side. We can throw all the earth towards the tent, and that will serve to protect us still further." Gertrude had gone round to the end of the tents as she spoke, and was showing them just how it could be managed, for she had been thinking it out on the previous night while the others were asleep.

"The idea isn't half bad, the only drawback being that we do not possess a shovel," said Marion, who was stepping out the ground in order to discover how long the trench would have to be.

"There is a rusty old shovel in the barn of The Welcome Home," chimed in Delia. "I saw it the first day that Marion dragged me over to look at that valuable piece of property." She thought it would be rather good fun to dig a trench and throw up an earthwork.

"Good child! Always cultivate the faculty of observation, for it is more useful than most things," said Marion. "I am going off to borrow that shovel straight away, and we will have the trench dug before we sleep. It will not be harder work than playing tennis on a hot afternoon, and of course it will be much more satisfactory, because we shall have something to show for our toil. Come along, Bruno, a walk will do you good, old fellow, and I shall be glad of your company."

"Let me come too," suggested Delia, who was mostly ready to go anywhere.

"No, thank you! it would be better for all of you to concentrate on the ordinary work, so that when I come back with the shovel we can go straight to the digging, and not have to stop for anything."

"But four of us cannot dig with one shovel!" exclaimed Jessica, going off into a gale of laughter at the bare idea.

"But indeed four of us can!" answered Marion, with a sagacious nod, as she settled her hat so that it would

shield her eyes. "Ten minutes each will be quite long enough, I fancy, and if the next one stands ready, why, that shovel will keep going, with never a pause, from the time I get back until sundown, and we shall all be tired into the bargain. I shall not be long, trust me."

"She can't be back much under an hour, for it is a very long mile from here to the place," said Gertrude, adding, as she turned into the day tent: "So much bother would have been saved for us if we had only been able to get hold of a horse to use while we are here."

"You might have had one if you had sent to the city; only, of course, it would not be very wise to buy a horse after that fashion, and it is easy to understand that the farmers all want their horses at this time of the year," said Delia.

Jessica took a good many journeys out to the bluff during the course of the morning to watch operations on board the schooner, where there was great activity.

All the tangle of ropes and spars had been cleared away, the broken mast had been fixed in some manner, and the vessel presented quite a different appearance. Then, after several journeys, she came running back to say that the three men were very busy in digging a deep trench in the sand right out seaward in front of the schooner.

"So, if we had only known, we could have borrowed shovels from them," she said regretfully, for it did seem such a pity that they should have to wait so long before starting on the trench. Marion had been gone nearly an hour and a half, and there was no sign of her returning yet.

"I don't think we would have borrowed their shovels," replied Gertrude, "and of course they would not care to lend them, as they would know that they would be wanting to use them so soon." She was not eager to lay herself under obligation.

"Here comes Marion, and she has the shovel over her shoulder; so we can start straight away."

It was Delia who announced Marion's coming, and she ran across the sand to meet her, to carry the shovel and several other burdens with which the arrival was laden.

"I have brought the mail and the bread," said Marion, dropping into the nearest chair and fanning herself vigorously, for she was looking very hot indeed. "Jim Washington was coming along the trail with his wagon, and I started to ride back with him, thinking that I was really in luck's way; but, alas! the near hind wheel slipped into a bad hole in the corduroy, and there it stuck in spite of our best efforts to get it out. In fact, we only succeeded in getting it in deeper, and as he had only one horse we had not sufficient power to pull it out by hitching on backwards. Finally, I loaded myself up with the bread and the mail, and he unhitched the horse to ride back to Poplar Ridge for a jack, and a man to help use it. He is such a scrap of a boy that he has no power to do anything that counts when it comes to a business like this, and I am feeling the effects of the soft life we have led for the last few months."

"What nonsense!" laughed Gertrude. "We don't call it a soft life to live in camp, to do our own washing and cooking, and to spend laborious days in tramping far and wide."

"Perhaps not," replied Marion, leaning back and closing her eyes. "Anyhow, I could not get that wagon out of the hole, and so I guessed that I must be effete, degenerate, or whatever is the correct term."

"You can sit there and rest for a while. We can dig without you," Gertrude said, handing her a fan. Picking up the shovel, she went off to the place she had marked out for the trench, and for the next three hours work went on with steady regularity. It is quite astonishing what a

large hole can be dug with one shovel in the space of three hours, if only the shovel is kept steadily at work. Ten minutes was the allotted time for each shift, and they changed with monotonous regularity.

"Bravo!" cried Marion. "We can let the shovel rest for an hour while we enjoy a leisurely tea, and then another hour of work will see the thing finished, and we can sleep in peace, with never a fear of being washed out."

"I am going to see how the other trench diggers are getting on, for they have three shovels while we have only one. They have sand to dig in, while we have hard soil; and they are men used to doing hard things, and we are only girls." Jessica snatched up her hat as she spoke, and made off round the bluff, leaving the others to get tea ready. Presently she came back, eagerly announcing that the schooner was still there, because the day tide had not been sufficient to float it, or else the hole was not yet deep enough. She further informed them that six men were digging now, standing up to their waists in water, and ropes had been fixed from the schooner to the steamer—a tremendous distance; but, as the shore was so shallow, the tug could not get in closer to the stranded craft.

"I vote that we go across to the bluff and take a look at the doings of our neighbours. It will be a rest and a relaxation to see other people work, and it may even prove enlightening also, as they may have an easier way of going to work, and it is of no use to deny that my arms are aching very badly."

Marion stretched her arms high above her head as she spoke. She had dug as vigorously as she did most things, and had made the dirt fly at a great rate when it came to her turn to wield the shovel.

They all trooped off to the bluff, not at all sorry for the chance of a rest. Mounting to the top, instead of going round, they sat down on the coarse grass which

clothed the promontory, and watched the work going on below.

A wide trench had been dug out in front of the schooner, and this, having filled at the last tide, was now a pool of water. That it had not been able to float the boat was probably due to the fact of her being so firmly wedged on the big sandstone boulders which, while serving to keep her fairly upright, yet held her in a vice-like grip, and would not let her go.

But the salvage men were not going to be easily beaten. They had discovered that she was not seriously damaged, and that she would float all right if they could only get her off. So they were working with the knowledge and the skill born of experience, and the ropes were fixed ready for a long pull and a strong pull at the next high tide.

The men were digging round the boulders now, for it was necessary to undermine the obstruction, so that it would give way easily when the pull came.

It would be difficult and dangerous work when it came to the crisis, for the next high tide would be in the night, and most likely it would be very dark, unless it was clear enough to be starlight.

"I suggest that we come up here to see the fun," said Marion. "We can sleep later to-morrow morning, so the little dissipation will not hurt us." The proposition being carried by acclamation, they trooped back to finish their trench.

When this was done there were a couple of hours of rest in which each one did exactly what seemed to her best; then they had supper, and in the deepening twilight betook themselves once more to the bluff. They took the hurricane lantern with them, for it might be rather dark descending the steep and slippery side of the bluff, and a slip would prove awkward,

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They were warmly wrapped up, and it was very pleasant watching the quiet night sky, the myriads of stars that showed in the blue vault of heaven, and the twinkling lights of the steamer out at sea.

It was nearly high tide. The great trench was hidden from view under water, and the men had climbed on to the deck of the schooner, where they yelled to each other in harsh, discordant tones.

On shore it was solitary enough. Not a sound broke the stillness, saving at intervals when a fox barked somewhere in the forests high in the background.

"Isn't it creepy?" whispered Jessica. She cuddled closer to her sisters, feeling that her courage gained by contact with their forms.

A shrill whistle sounded from the steamer. There was a brisker activity on board the schooner, lights flickered here and there, hoarse voices yelled orders and were answered back in tones that were equally harsh, and then, with a sucking, hissing noise, the stranded boat seemed to heel over, righted herself with a jerk, and began to move slowly out to the open sea.

A wild whoop of triumph broke from the salvage men as the vessel answered to the pull of the tow-ropes, and the four girls on the bluff shouted back a jubilant hurrah. Then the distance between ship and shore grew slowly wider, and they were alone once more.

## CHAPTER X

### A Great Shock

ANOTHER fortnight passed away. The nights were getting longer, but the days were so much more beautiful that, instead of the camp-dwellers getting tired of the wild life, they grew still more in love with the time spent in the open.

Jessica had blossomed into a robust appearance which made her so much like Delia that they were all amazed at the likeness, and she was so full of fun that it was easy to see the good that had been wrought. The others were brown and bonny too, and as vigorous as healthy girls should be.

Gertrude had waded right through her big bag of books, and had sent to the city for another batch. But she was the only one of the four who did very much reading. Delia had certainly taken to drawing with great vigour, but it was not scenery which she tried to put on paper, her work being entirely concerned with planning houses and computing heights and distances, so that she might know how far from a ceiling a window should be, and how high a chimney with regard to the rest of the house.

"It is so funny that you should choose to go in for architectural drawing, because now you will be able to plan all the improvements on my farm when I have one," said Marion, when she was looking at Delia's work one day.

"I am very much afraid that, if you depend on the

results of your farming to pay the bills, the improvements will not amount to much more than a new front to the pig-pen, or a chicken-house to be put out on the stubble," retorted Delia, for Marion's craze for farming was a source of amusement to them all, though Jessica was wont to declare that she would rather have worked on a farm than done anything else, if work had chanced to be her portion.

"Well, it may chance to be your portion even now, and then I shall look to you to support me in my farming venture," Marion said. She held her head on one side to get another view of Delia's group of ornamental chimney-stacks.

"Oh, don't speak of it! There is no need to invite disaster!" cried Jessica, with such a look of alarm that the others laughed at her air of tragedy.

"I think I feel like Jessica—that it would be the refinement of torture to be poor again," Delia said soberly, as she sharpened another pencil and proceeded with her work.

"I wonder what has become of our deliverer? He seemed to be poor enough," said Marion musingly. "But it would have only been good manners on his part just to call and thank us for having taken care of his old ship. We had all our trouble for nothing, too, which was so intensely exasperating. One may bear a thing very well, even if it is uncomfortable, if it is to do some good; but this did not even help Captain Jones of the Cannery Fleet—I think that was his illustrious name—for, as it chanced, no one came along to loot the derelict."

"We were very glad of the shelter when our tents were down," Gertrude reminded her. "So we could afford to guard the ship, if only in payment of our debt."

"Ah, the free board and lodging of which the old man reminded us with such gentle irony!" laughed Delia.

She asked another question about her work, for if Gertrude did not shine at drawing she possessed the faculty of balance in a very high degree, and she always knew when a thing was not in harmony, which was a very great help.

Gertrude had taken to botany with keen zest this summer, and she went long rambles in search of specimens, tramping for miles alone, when the others did not want to accompany her. She set off the next morning soon after breakfast, with Bruno for a companion, as everyone else had something to do, and did not care to come.

Marion was baking cakes in the camp oven, for they were going to have a picnic on the sands on the following day. The whole family of the M'Whortles and the Washingtons were to be entertained, so it was necessary that there should be a good stock of provisions, as the juvenile M'Whortles had what Delia called the true British-Columbian appetite.

But Gertrude was not great at cakes, especially when they had to be baked in the camp oven, and, as it was her day off duty, she decided to go so far afield, that she would not be tempted into assisting in any way. Tomorrow, when the party was in progress, she would take the heaviest of the labour, and make coffee in bucketfuls if necessary.

She had a tin case for specimens slung at her back. There was a serviceable stick in her hand, which would be useful in more ways than one. She could knock a snake on the head if she chanced upon one, or she could dig up any plant that she might require. It was also useful as a weapon in pushing her way through thickets of bramble, and these occurred with astonishing frequency in the places where she loved best to ramble.

It was of no use to go up into the forest on the hill

behind the camp. She had found that her happiest hunting ground was along the shore, for there were few tall trees to shade the things growing lower down, and so everything had an equal chance of sunshine and shower.

She was thinking a good deal of the young man who had helped them, and whom they in turn had helped. It always brought a sense of irritation, but in spite of this her thoughts would revert to him, although she never spoke of him in the presence of her sisters unless one of them brought the subject up, and then she said as little as possible. It was humiliating to her pride that they should have so cheerfully helped him, and that he should not even have said: "Thank you!" If they had failed to keep watch over the derelict, and someone else had claimed to be the first to find it, then it would have been different. But they had not failed, and his disappointment in not being first was in no sense a fault of theirs.

She tried to think of other things, and was even repeating to herself long extracts from a book on botany which she had been reading, when Bruno, walking solemnly in front of her, lifted his head and growled.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" she asked cheerfully, and stooping to pat him, she found that a row of bristles stood erect on his back, which meant that he was very displeased indeed.

"Is there a rabbit in yonder, or is it a hare that you think you see?" she went on, as the dog darted forward, disappearing in the undergrowth.

If it was a rabbit that he had found they might as well have it for supper, so Gertrude thought; but she knew very well that if she were not close at hand, to get it the first moment the life went out of its little body, there would be no getting it at all. Having had to fend for himself so long, Bruno could not get out of the way of sampling his kill straight off, and, having a very big

appetite, it did not take him long to gobble up a rabbit.

It took considerable fighting to scramble through that tangle of undergrowth, and Gertrude was thinking there would be a good many rents to mend in her stout serge skirt if she had much more of this thing, when she suddenly tumbled through the last barrier of thorns and butternut scrub, nearly falling headlong on to a little natural clearing.

It was an encampment of some kind upon which she had stumbled, and she glanced hurriedly round to make sure there had been no witnesses of her undignified approach, when she saw to her surprise that the tent lay in a heap, as if it had been blown over, while various properties were scattered about, as if the owner had just flung them down anywhere, and left them so.

"Why, it must be the camp of the unknown, and he has never come back to claim his things! How very strange!" she exclaimed, speaking aloud; while Bruno crept to her side, and, looking up in her face, whined piteously, then darted round the encampment again, growling at an imaginary someone hidden away under that collapsed tent.

Was anyone there?

Gertrude stood hesitating. She hated to pry into things which did not concern her, and she could not understand why a young man who said that he was poor should be content to go away and leave his property to be ruined by wind and rain.

As a matter of fact there had been no rain since the night of the big storm, but then there easily might have been; and, oh, it was reprehensible to leave property lying about in this fashion! Why, there were even books tossed out on to the grass, just as if they were so much waste paper!

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Now an ill-used book always stirred her to wrath, for to her books were sentient things. They had feeling, and they had life—that is to say, unless they were very dry indeed—and she hated to see them ill used.

Half-involuntarily she moved forward to pick up the volumes from the tuft of coarse grass into which they had fallen. They were damaged by the wet, and they had been scorched by the fierce sunshine, which had drawn the covers and spoiled their outward appearance. Well-bound and expensive editions they appeared to be, one volume being a Life of Garibaldi, and the other, poems by Christina Rossetti.

Smiling to herself at finding two old friends in such a position, she turned them over, and the top one opened at its title page. A name was written there. When she saw it Gertrude cried out in terror, for the name, written in bold, characteristic fashion, was—Douglas Amoyne.

## CHAPTER XI

### Temptation

GERTRUDE stood so long without moving that an inquisitive bluebird flew down and was about to settle on her shoulder, when, startled by a sob of utter misery, the tiny creature fluttered away in a great hurry.

"Oh, it cannot be that Douglas is alive and here!" she gasped. She looked round with a frightened movement, as if expecting to see him appear from behind the thick curtain of brushwood that stretched along the little hill at the rear of the encampment.

Of course he was not there! Plainly the place had been deserted since the night of the big storm, when the young man, driven out of his tent by its collapse, had seen the vessel drifting inshore, and had come to the rescue of anyone who might need helping.

Then she remembered that he had said he would come back to his camp for his bicycle; and, yes, there were still the marks faintly to be seen of where he had wheeled his cycle across the strip of loose soil on to the sands. He had not stayed to put anything straight, but he had just gone off as quickly as he could. But why had he not come back again?

The question sent a chill horror into the heart of Gertrude. Was it possible that he had found out who they were? Or had some information reached him concerning his father's death, which might have taken him away so

suddenly that he had no time nor thought for those poor little bits of property that he had left in the wilderness?

But these were questions she could not answer. She stood in her dumb misery, feeling that she had suddenly grown old, that life was scarcely worth the living, and that she would thankfully flee to the ends of the earth rather than encounter this cousin whom she had believed—ah, yes, and had hoped!—was dead long since.

It was just horrible to have to confess this even to herself, but she was in the mood for plain dealing this morning. She was not disposed to gloss over or to cover anything up, and she told herself quite openly that it was a bitter disappointment to find that her cousin, Douglas Amoyne, was not dead. She knew it would nearly break her heart to return and tell her sisters that he was alive, that they had no right to Uncle Joseph's money, and that they had all to go back to the treadmill grind of earning their own living again—and that before they had had the chance of culture and travel which she had so longed to give them.

Oh, why had they wasted all those precious months of summer just in idling in the wilderness, when they might have been going from place to place in Europe seeing things, and learning all the time? Of course the reason had been that they had been all so tired of work and struggle that the play-holiday had appealed to them more than anything more bustling could possibly have done, and so far as Delia and Jessica were concerned it had seemed absolutely necessary.

"Still, if we had known or even guessed that it was likely to come to an end so soon, we would have gone to Europe at once. Now it may be that we shall never go!" murmured Gertrude to herself, her dry lips making the effort of articulate speech.

Then common sense came to her aid, and she remem-



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bered that if they had even known or guessed that Douglas was alive, they would not have enjoyed the use of his money at all; but their lives would have still gone on in the old grey round, with no brightness at all.

"At least we have had a grand rest," she muttered, "and we might have had our European trip as well, if it had not been for the perversity of the fate which sent that young man to camp here so close to us." She turned again to the books, which she still held in her hands.

Suddenly a wild hope assailed her that perhaps this camp might not belong to Douglas Amoyne at all, and it might be only coincidence that his name was written in the books. Why, they might have been picked up in a secondhand-book shop months or even years ago!

Much as she hated to pry into what did not concern her, Gertrude decided that she was well within her rights to look a little closer into these properties which had been left neglected so long. Moving with a reluctant step to the edge of the collapsed tent, she stooped down, and, lifting the canvas as best she could, proceeded to make a search among the contents.

But her quest only confirmed her fears. There were articles of wearing apparel marked with her cousin's name. A battered tin coffee-pot had "D. A." scratched with fantastic flourishes upon the lid. There was a brier pipe with "D. A." carved upon the bowl. When she had seen all these things the heart of Gertrude grew cold within her, for it was plain there was no longer any room for doubt.

She stood erect, gazing out over the quiet waters of the bay, and wondering how she would have the courage to go home and tell her sisters of the thing which she had by accident discovered.

Suppose that she had not chanced to go that way; indeed she would not have happened upon the camp if it had not been for Bruno, and as she thought of it she wished—

ah, how she wished!—that she had left the old dog at home. If she had not come she would not have known, and things might have gone on as before.

Then she began to argue with herself as to whether he, Douglas, had any real right to the money of the father whom he had treated so badly. If Joseph Amoyne, in the softening of heart which had come to him at the last, had made a will, would he not rather have left his money to the niece who had done her best to give him a chance of life, rather than to the son who had flouted him and gone away, leaving him to loneliness and sorrow? Moreover, was it not better that the four sisters should have the money, and use it wisely, than that Douglas should have it to make ducks and drakes of?

“Why should I speak of what I have seen this morning?”

Gertrude gave a start of dismay. It seemed to her that it was not her own voice which uttered the words, but that it must be the utterance of someone else.

How she tingled from head to foot at the mere suggestion of being able to leave things as they were!

It would be so easy, too! All she had to do was to keep silence, and to go on as she had done before. No one would ask her where she had been that morning. It was enough that she had been for a stroll; there were even plants in her tin specimen case, and so there was no need for her to gather any for the sake of pretending.

Her instinct of straightforwardness rose in instant rebellion. She could not deceive. Ever since she had been old enough to know right from wrong she had prided herself upon her uprightness, and now, if she had to sink in her own estimation, how would she be able to bear the burden of her life?

Sophistry came to her aid. She would not need to deceive, for keeping silent was quite another thing. All

she had to do was to lock the knowledge of what she had discovered within her breast, and to say nothing about it. Surely that would not be a sin!

Of course it might chance that one of the other girls might happen upon the deserted camp, and come rushing back with the news of Douglas Amoyne having been in the neighbourhood. Well, in such a case it would be easy enough to decide in family conclave what it was best to do. Even as she thought about it, Gertrude could hear Marion's decided tones saying that Mr. Carson must be written to, and they must make preparations to yield what was never their own.

But that would be quite time enough to give way, and even then it would not be necessary for her to say that she had already found this out, and had been hiding it from her sisters.

"Perhaps they will never come this way, or if they do they will never take the trouble to pry into what does not concern them," she said softly, and with a sudden lightning of her heart.

She took the two books and laid them carefully under the protecting canvas. She even told herself she was doing that to keep the books from being spoiled, and would not admit that she was putting them out of sight of any casual observer.

She stood erect, lightly brushed some dust from the front of her frock with her hand, and called to Bruno that it was time to return.

But now the instinct was on her to hide even the direction in which she had been walking; so, turning inland, she made her way through fields which had dropped out of cultivation, skirted abandoned pastures, and after a long and weary walk arrived hot and tired at the deserted farm which went by the name of The Welcome Home. A sudden shower caught her here, and not wanting to get

wet, she turned into the barn to shelter until it should be over. Of choice she would have preferred to take refuge in the house; but the door of that was locked, and entrance could only be obtained by clambering in through a window. As she was too tired for so much exertion, she turned into the barn, and, sitting down on an old bucket, watched the slant of the rain past the open door.

Bruno had come with her, but perhaps it was memory which stirred in the old dog, for as he lay by her side, with his nose on his paws, he kept uttering little whimpering cries of distress.

"Poor old fellow, poor old fellow! what is the matter?" she asked, letting her hand drop caressingly on to his head. She suddenly started in alarm, remembering that it was in this very place that poor old Anthony Bream had ended his life.

"Oh, I cannot stay here, I cannot!" she exclaimed in great distress, and never realized that the sudden panic which had overtaken her was the result of that resolution of hiding upon which she had determined, and which was already beginning its work of destroying her fine fearlessness. She would have to be afraid now—afraid of things which had not mattered at all in the past—and she was to lose her peace of mind, her pride in herself, and all the uplifting influences of conscious rectitude.

But not yet was all this made apparent to her; it is only by degrees that one's moral characteristics stand revealed. At present her one thought was to escape the environment which was so full of dread; so out into the rain she hurried, and Bruno pressed at her side, as if he too was thankful to get away from the barn and its painful associations.

The rain ended as suddenly as it began; it was only a little shower which had lost its way. Gertrude, arrived back at camp in bright sunshine, found, to her immense relief, that no notice was taken by any of them as to her

doings, for the first batch of cakes had turned out rather a failure, owing to the supply of firewood running short at the critical moment; so Marion was busy on a second supply, while Delia and Jessica were picking up another lot of dry wood with which to feed the fire.

It was very fortunate for them that there was firewood in abundance to be had for the trouble of picking it up. It is true that there was a hatchet among the camp equipment, and it came in very useful in chopping meat, and they had even used it to cut bread on occasions when an influx of visitors had caused a shortage of knives. But if they had been obliged to attempt cutting down a tree with the thing, it was the operator who would have suffered, not the tree.

Gertrude volunteered to go and help with the wood gathering; and, as Marion had just then reached the very critical stage in her operations, she was most willing to be left alone to pursue her cookery in peace.

Gertrude slung a bag across her shoulders and went off up the winding bed of the little stream, which was the nearest way into the timberlands. There was nothing very valuable in the trees up here, for they were all fairly young, which was accounted for by Mrs. M'Whortle, who said that a disastrous forest fire had raged along that side of the hills about fifteen years previously, and had swept the forest bare of everything but charred stumps. These, having life left at the roots, in due course sprouted again, and in process of time the vigorous young growth thrust the dead old stumps to one side, to give themselves room. These, falling here and there, provided fine natural charcoal for the mere trouble of picking it up, and it was one of the recognized duties of the campers to gather charred bits of wood for the fire. This task was mostly performed in company, as being so much more cheerful than doing it alone.

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As she climbed the hill, Gertrude could hear the merry voices of the two younger girls and their little peals of laughter; but instead of going straight to where they were searching for lumps of cinder wood, she set to work picking bits up here and there, until by the time she reached them her bag was almost full, and she had had an opportunity of getting herself well in hand, or at least so she thought. Then she went forward at a slow walk and joined them where they stood on a little knoll which jutted out from among the crowding forest trees, and they were chattering like a pair of magpies.

"Ah, it is more talking than work that you do!" she exclaimed, with a laugh which was meant to sound as lighthearted as their merriment, but which somehow had a hollow sound that would have scarcely deceived anyone.

"Oh, Gertrude, have you come back, and did you have a nice stroll?" cried Jessica. Not staying for an answer, she caught hold of her sister by the sleeve, and dragging her forward, she cried eagerly: "Look out over there, will you, and tell me if you can see a tent, or what looks as if it might have been a tent before it fell down?"

"Which way?" asked Gertrude, commanding her voice as best she might, although her heart was beating with dull, heavy throbs, and she was feeling absolutely sick with apprehension.

"Over there, yonder by that big rock," said Jessica, pointing a vigorous finger in a direction which was far removed from the place where Gertrude had made her tragic discovery.

Gertrude's vision cleared instantly, and she gazed out over the billowing sea of forest trees with real interest, for of course it mattered a great deal to them whether there were going to be other camps in the neighbourhood, and what sort of people were making them.

"I do not think it is a tent; but it may be, for certainly

Delia's eyes are much better than mine. But there is one way to find out, and that is to go and see if anyone has come to camp there."

"Too much trouble, for to-day at least, and there is the festivity to-morrow. We must see what the next day may bring," said Delia. She faced round upon Gertrude to ask, with disconcerting abruptness: "What have you been doing with yourself? You are as white as a sheet, and you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Perhaps I have," Gertrude answered, with an uneasy laugh. "I had to take refuge from a shower in the barn at The Welcome Home, and the thought of poor old Anthony Bream got on my nerves rather badly, so perhaps it was his unquiet spirit hovering near to disturb me."

"That is nonsense!" exclaimed Delia, who was thoroughly practical, and not troubled with a too-vivid imagination. "I do not believe in any ghosts except those we make ourselves; and when people suppose that they are seeing spooks it is only because they have an unquiet conscience."

"Gertrude has not an unquiet conscience," broke in Jessica with some heat.

"I did not say that she had," answered Delia with asperity, for she had seen Gertrude wince, and she was angry that her words had been taken so literally. "I was talking about people in general. It is only people who do wrong that have guilty consciences, and our guide and mentor would not come under that heading of course."

Jessica made a diversion at this moment by slipping off an upstanding root on which she had perched in order to get a better view of the scenery. As she had hurt herself rather badly it stayed any further talk anent uneasy consciences, to the great relief of Gertrude, who felt that she

was a hypocrite of the deepest dye, and believed that she would never hold up her head before her young sisters again, just because of that sin of hiding.

They went down the hill then, Jessica hanging on to Gertrude's arm because of the injury to her foot, and all the time she was murmuring little sentences of endearment in the other's ear, which was a way she had, and was meant to serve as an expression of her gratitude for the love which her elders lavished upon her.

Gertrude carried her own bag of wood, while Delia took that of Jessica; and, although it was downhill all the way to the tents, they were all three tired out when they reached camp.

Marion was in a state of triumphant satisfaction, for the second batch of cakes was all that anyone could desire, and the double supply would be of value, for the first lot were not so bad as to be uneatable, and it was of all things necessary to have a good supply.

"But how pale you are!" she cried, turning upon Gertrude almost as suddenly as Jessica had done. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Walking too far, I expect," answered Gertrude in a weary tone. "Anyhow, I have a splitting headache, and I think that I will go in and lie down, if no one wants me, for a while."

"Yes, that is the very best thing to do, poor dear. You are another martyr to science, though I do not think the bits of weeds you walk so many miles to collect can be worth a headache, or a heartache either, and you look as if you were suffering from both."

Marion reached out a flouy hand to pat her sister's shoulder as she spoke, and Gertrude turned away with a heavy heart, for surely these sisters of hers all spoke with barbed tongues just now, albeit they were so innocent of malicious intention.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Picnic

THE next day dawned gloriously fine, and before the morning was very far on its way a two-horse wagon, laden with M'Whortles of various sizes and several big baskets, came bumping along the corduroy, then stopped at the point where the poor apology for a road gave out.

The children were in a state of riotous spirits, and they announced their arrival with so much shouting that Delia and Jessica at once came bounding round the corner of the bluff to meet them and conduct them round to the tents.

Mrs. M'Whortle was a strong, capable woman, and seizing her baby in one arm and the youngest but one in the other, she set off across the loose sand with a springy step and a vigorous tread; while the children toiled after her laden with the baskets, which appeared to be heavy. But the eldest boy and girl had to stay and unhitch the horses, which were afterwards tied to some bushes where they could feed.

Delia stayed with the two youngsters to take a lesson in unhitching, for of course no one knew how soon learning of that sort came in useful, and at least it was as well to learn all one could. Gertrude and Marion were quite used to harnessing horses, having done it at Templeton, and also on their father's Ontario holding, but the younger girls had been too small to do things of that sort in those days.

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It was real fun unhitching those horses. The great creatures were as playful as kittens, and, having been used to children from colthood, they were gentle beyond the ordinary, although the way in which they flourished their great heels was enough to scare a nervous person.

By the time the horses were tied where they could feed, Mrs. Wilberforce Washington came driving up with her five children and the small boy who usually brought the bread and the mails for the campers, and whose name was Victor Green. He called himself the hired man, although in reality he was only a rather small boy, with the courage and spirit of a grown-up.

Mrs. Washington was a meek little woman, very much impressed by the honour that was done her in being bidden to a festivity of this sort, and she was quite shocked when Delia started to assist Victor in unhitching the horse from the Washington wagon.

"Oh, my dear Miss Amoyne, there isn't any need for you to be doing that! Victor is uncommon handy, and he can manage a horse as well as my husband almost. Sometimes I think he gets on better with them; for, you see, he plays with the creatures, and horses are like children. If only you will humour them a bit you can do almost anything with them."

"Oh, I like helping to unhitch, thank you!" replied Delia politely. "If you will just walk on round the end of the bluff you will find Gertrude and Marion with the others. We shall not be many minutes in coming after you."

Mrs. Washington did a funny little bow by way of acknowledgment, and then permitted herself to be towed across the strip of loose ground by her eager children, while the two eldest M'Whortles stayed with Delia to help Victor to unhitch.

"I am so glad that you were able to come," said Delia

in a cordial tone. "We were so afraid that you would not be able to get away at such a busy time of the year."

"It was her that got me off," said Victor confidentially, with a nod in the direction of the little woman, who was being urged along by her impatient youngsters. "She is just a brick, and I would do anything I could for her, that I would! Old W. W. said he didn't see what need there was for me to come, seeing as I wasn't one of the family, and as he didn't think that he could spare me. And what do you think she did?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Delia truthfully enough. To her way of thinking, Mrs. Washington was merely a rather silly and incapable little woman, whose airs and affectations were decidedly ridiculous.

"Why, she just made out that she couldn't face the responsibility of driving the wagonload of children along the corduroy herself," chuckled the boy. "Old W. W. was obliged to give way then, for he could not leave the store to come himself, and he knew that she had set her heart on coming, so it was of no use to tell her that she could not come. Oh, we had him fine, she and I, and we have just enjoyed our little joke. She ain't no more afraid of horses than I am afraid of our old cat; but there are some women who know they look prettiest when they are sort of asking to be taken care of, and she is one of them. I like her, I do, and there isn't much that I would not do for her either."

"Good boy!" cried Delia approvingly. "But you shall not do anything to-day except take your ease in the way that suits you best. I only wish that we had a boat, but we have not been able to get hold of one anywhere in the neighbourhood, so that is one of the things we have had to do without."

"Well, you have not missed much, to my way of thinking," replied Victor, as he marched by her side with his

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hands in his pockets, and wearing quite a millionaire air of importance. He was humble enough in everyday life, but an occasion of this sort demanded special behaviour, to his way of thinking, and so he walked with a swagger and held his head up, to the great delight of the two young M'Whortles, who came behind imitating him to the best of their ability.

"There are the others making for the sands already!" cried Delia, as they rounded the bluff and saw a company of children scurrying across the sand. The tide was running out, and already the smooth playground most beloved of the youngsters stretched out in front of them.

"Victor, you haven't brought the baskets," piped the voice of Mrs. Washington in tones of reproach.

Victor pulled up short, his millionaire air dropping from him. "There now, I might have known that I should go and make a stupid of myself, swanking about as if I had five thousand dollars a year. All right, Mrs. W., I'll have the baskets here in a brace of shakes!" He turned back as he spoke, crossing the loose ground at a run, and presently came back more slowly, laden with two big baskets which appeared to be heavy.

"We thought that it was not fair you should have to provide food for so many, especially as it must be a great bother to cook things out-of-doors, or at least in a tent, so we just brought along a few cakes and pies for the children to put their teeth in." Mrs. Washington spoke in a tone of apology to Gertrude as Victor toiled up with the baskets and set them down in front of Gertrude.

A few minutes previously Mrs. M'Whortle had also set two big baskets down in front of Gertrude and made exactly the same little speech, so it was as much as the two hostesses could do to keep from laughing aloud, although they were greatly touched by the thoughtful consideration of their guests, and did not realize that it was one of the unwritten

laws of that part of the world to bring as much to a feast as one would be likely to take from it. But for consideration of this kind, hospitality would be almost out of the question in a land where servants are conspicuous by their absence and a person must either do things for herself or go with them undone.

"But that is not fair," laughed Gertrude. "Marion spent most of yesterday in baking cakes for the children, and we even brewed a special sort of lemonade this morning, so that there should be no trouble later, and now you and Mrs. M'Whortle have brought your own provisions."

"My dear, that is quite all right," said Mrs. M'Whortle, with her jolly laugh. "You shall eat our things and we will eat yours, and if there is anything left over when the day is done we will share it out evenly. Then we shall all be satisfied. Though with such a troop of children running free all day I would not like to say that there would be much to share after all. One slice seems to help another down, I always think, when it comes to young things, and the more there is to be eaten, why, the more they eat. But it is a big blessing to have them hearty."

"Yes, indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Washington softly. She had lost two little ones, and it was their death which had helped to bring such a shadow to her face.

Gertrude was quick to understand the look of deep sadness which had come into the faded eyes, and she laid her hand lightly on the little woman's arm, saying earnestly: "It is very kind of you, and Mrs. M'Whortle too, and now we have just got to put away sad thoughts for to-day, and to be as happy as we can."

How easy to say it, but how much more difficult the carrying out! Try as she would, Gertrude could not banish her own private worries, and never had she known such a haunting trouble as this thing which she had to a certain extent brought upon herself. Over and over

again she said in her heart that she was justified in hiding from the others the thing which she had so strangely discovered. Over and over again she told herself that as Douglas Amoyne had been advertised for he ought to have seen the advertisement and replied. If he chose to keep silence that was his business, not hers, and so it did not matter.

Through the long hours of that bright day she laughed and talked, did her very best to make the time pass pleasantly for the guests, and tried to appear as carefree as any of them. But the remembrance was always there, and she was looking vainly for some prospect of escape from a situation which bade fair to become intolerable, for certainly camp life had lost its zest now that she was so afraid of the others stumbling upon what she herself had found. Some chance words of her guests pointed out a reasonable excuse for the move for which she was secretly longing.

"You won't be alone on Clamping Bay much longer," said Mrs. Washington, as she sat with Gertrude, Mrs. M'Whortle, and Marion on the shady side of the tents in the early afternoon, while all the rest of the party were hard at work digging for clams and fishing for cockles far out on the sands.

"What do you mean?" asked Gertrude, coming back with a start from a painful little reverie in which she seemed to see Delia and Jessica rushing back from a walk declaring loudly that they had come on the deserted camp and had found that their unknown rescuer was none other than their supposedly dead cousin, Douglas Amoyne.

"There are a large party of young men from a factory in Winnipeg coming down here to camp for a month," said the little woman. "The agent has written to my husband about food supplies, for of course there will be a lot wanted for such a big party, and Wilberforce is awful

tickled about it. First you and your sisters, and now all this tribe of young men; why, the place won't be the same!"

"What dreadful news!" cried Marion. "It will just spoil the shore for us. If they had been girls it would have been bearable, but we cannot stay here with such a crowd of men coming to infest our solitudes."

"Of course not. We shall have to move on," replied Gertrude, trying to keep her bounding relief out of her face and voice.

"Oh, that will never do!" said Mrs. Washington. "Shall we write and tell the party to make their camp in some other place?"

"No, no; that would be so selfish," Gertrude answered. She tried to feel as if it were really very good and unselfish of her to want these intruders to come. "But we should not have been staying much longer in this part in any case, for we are going to Europe in the fall, you know, and we shall have to make preparations for being away so long, for we expect to be gone for a year."

"You really mean to come back?" asked Mrs. M'Whortle.

It was Marion who replied now, bursting out impulsively: "Oh yes, of course we shall come! Canada is home now. But even if it were not, I mean even if we had a home in England, I think that I would still choose to live in Canada, because it is the land of enterprise, and it is the land of freedom too."

Gertrude turned her head away. She was so afraid that Marion would look in her direction and see in her face something of what was in her heart. She was feeling at that moment that never, never would she return to Canada if once she could turn her back upon it. It would not do to let Marion even guess at that just yet, or there would be no peace until the reason had been dragged out. Gertrude had never felt afraid of Marion before, nor had she

ever trembled at the thought of what her sister's judgment might be concerning any of her actions. But now—ah, it was that fatal discovery which had made all the difference! Gertrude winced afresh every time she faced the truth regarding her own conduct in hiding the knowledge she had so strangely gained.

Mrs. Washington was talking now, saying something in that mild prattling way she had, and Marion was exclaiming in delight.

"I beg your pardon, I was thinking of something else just then, and not attending at all," said Gertrude, with a smile, realizing how fearfully absent-minded she must seem in the eyes of these visitors.

"Ah, we all know what it means when young ladies let their wits go wandering in that fashion!" exclaimed Mrs. M'Whortle, with a jolly laugh; and Gertrude grew crimson from sheer mortification, which only made the kindly Scotswoman laugh the louder.

"I was saying," went on the mild voice of Mrs. Washington, "that a company has been formed to start a butter factory at old Colman's place, this side of Poplar Ridge. There is good water there, and the house and barn could be adapted, which would save the expense of putting up factory buildings. It is to be a sort of co-operative affair; that is, every farmer sending milk will have a share in the concern, and of course it will be to the interest of each one to make the factory a paying concern."

"Oh, what a very good idea!" cried Marion with enthusiasm. "May we have some shares in it, Gertrude? I should love to do something, if only a little, for this place where we have all been so happy. We have had a truly delightful summer, and it is horrid to think that it must soon come to an end. But I for one do not want to stay any longer if the place is to be overrun with a lot of young-men campers."

"We might certainly have a few shares in the factory," Gertrude agreed readily enough. Surely this would be a good way of salving her conscience with regard to keeping the money. It should be used in the wisest way that she could find. She would benefit humanity, and she would promote thrift, and so expiate her own wrong in keeping that to which she had no right.

"Now come, I say that is downright kind of you!" exclaimed Mrs. M'Whortle heartily, while Mrs. Washington purred her thankfulness in a lower key. "I told M'Whortle he was not to go bothering you about it, for he had said what a good thing it would be if you would take shares, sort of give the thing an impetus, you know, and there is so much in the way any big venture of the sort is started. Now I feel as if we should get our factory, and that, of course, will mean that the farms will get taken up again, and so the neighbourhood will prosper. I hate to see land fall out of cultivation. Hallo, what are those youngsters screaming about?"

Well might she ask. A wild chorus of shouting and yelling made itself heard from the young ones, who had been spread far and wide over the sands. Gertrude, whose senses seemed abnormally acute, fancied that they were coming from that part of the shore where the young man had had his tent. Perhaps some of them had wandered so far and had found that which was hidden there. Yes, she could hear the voice of Delia, who, forgetful of dignity, was in the first rank of the runners, and was shouting—ah! what was it that she was shouting?

"Gertrude, Gertrude, we have had a perfectly wonderful find, it is——"

But the shout of someone else cutting across the voice of Delia just then made it impossible for those at the tents to hear what was being said.

Gertrude had sprung to her feet, and, with dilated eyes

and ghastly white face, was waiting to catch Delia's next words.

Marion had sprung up too, but she was looking at Gertrude, startled by the look of suffering on her sister's face. Was Gertrude ill that she should look like that?

But Delia was shouting again, and holding up something as she ran. "We have found—it has—name in it!"

That was all that was distinguishable, but it was enough for Gertrude, who suddenly saw a yawning black chasm opening at her feet; and, turning deadly sick, she lurched forward, dropping in an unconscious heap at the feet of Mrs. M'Whortle.

Now indeed was consternation! Never, never before had Gertrude been guilty of the weakness of fainting. And there seemed no reason for it—at least none that any of them could see. In speechless distress her sisters hovered over her, while Mrs. M'Whortle and little Mrs. Washington did their best to bring her round. When at length her heavy eyes unclosed, she looked round as if in search of something.

"What is it, dear? What do you want?" asked Marion tenderly. She was looking white and shaken herself, for she had been badly scared, and could not get over it in a hurry.

Gertrude struggled to speak, but for a few moments could not, while her troubled gaze sought to read what she wanted to know from the faces of those standing about her. She managed to falter forth: "What was it that Delia found?"

"Only a little book, very much soaked with wet," replied Marion soothingly. "It has your name in it, so it must have been carried out of the tent on the night we were washed out, unless, indeed, you dropped it sometime when you have been sitting out on the sand." She was more amazed than ever, for until this moment she had certainly

not connected Gertude's sudden indisposition with anything from the outside.

"Is that all?" The instant relief for Gertrude could have but one result in her present condition, and, leaning her head on her hands, she burst into a peal of laughter, which frightened them all only in a less degree than her fainting had done.

"Oh, please forgive me!" she exclaimed, arresting her laughter by a great effort just where it touched on the verge of tears. "I cannot think what has made me so silly. I suppose that I was not feeling quite fit, and then I heard Delia shouting about something she had found, and I thought—oh, I don't know what I thought!"

"I will take care that I do not make such a silly riot about anything in the future," muttered Delia in the keenest self-reproach. For her the day was spoiled. It seemed a truly dreadful thing that she should have made Gertrude swoon in that fashion, and she felt as if it would be a very long time before she could be happy again.

Marion was greatly disturbed too, and instead of raising all sorts of objections to an early breaking up of the camp she set to work the very next day to institute the most vigorous preparations for going away.

In spite of her efforts, though, it was three days before they could get everything done.

Gertrude had wired the news of their coming to Quebec, for they still retained the little attic flat in the tall old house on Montcalm Mount, so they had their own home to which they might go for a brief stay before taking wing for Europe.

It was a great comfort to them all to think that they had not given up those two big rooms which had sheltered them for so long, and which had been so truly home to them all in the days of their poverty.

It was really hard work saying good-bye to the silent

stretches of seashore and the forest-clad heights of their summer camping ground. It was all very well for them to say that they would come again next summer, but each one knew that it was extremely unlikely they would do so. Gertrude knew very well that nothing would induce her to come to that place again if she could by any means avoid doing so. Marion had resolved that by next summer she would have settled to work at growing things, for it was the kind of life which appealed to her most, and she was not minded to be an idler. Delia and Jessica cared very little beyond having a good time, and as they had had an uncommonly good time in camp, it was that sort of life which appealed to them most at the present. Later on, when they had experienced other kinds of pleasure, their outlook would change accordingly.

No one wanted to buy the tents or the other camping requisites, so for the present they were stored in the empty farmhouse, as that was the nearest place. Mr. Wilberforce Washington thought that he might be able to dispose of them later on, and so it was better to leave them as near to the shore as possible, and so save the labour of carting them over miles of bad trail to Poplar Ridge.

It was all done at last, and then the four girls with their personal luggage were packed into the wagon which Victor Green had brought over for them and driven away.

It was only Gertrude who did not look back. She had set her face steadily towards the future, and henceforth it was to be her aim to forget the past. If only that one day of her life, when she had stumbled on the deserted camp, could be blotted from her recollection, then she would be happy again. But the trouble was that every minute of it stood out in such a lurid light that, far from forgetting it, the time was never out of her thoughts.

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Hovering Dread

"I BELIEVE that it gets hotter and hotter!" sighed Jessica. "If it keeps on at this rate there will be nothing left of us but spots of grease."

"I am quite comfortable now. Come over here and sit beside this window; you will feel the air better." Delia moved as she spoke to make room for Jessica, who walked languidly to the seat which her sister had vacated for her. Then she sat down, leaning her head on her hand with such a listless air that Delia was instantly concerned.

"Don't you feel well, Jess? You are always moping these days, and you look just washed out."

"That is how I feel," sighed the pale-faced Jessica. "And I wish, oh! I wish that we were back at the camp on Clamping Bay, for I always felt well when I was there."

"Perhaps you would have felt seedy all the same if you had been there now," said Delia, with intent to cheer. She got up from her place and went to ask Gertrude for a fan and some perfume, which might mitigate the miseries of Jessica.

It was two days since they had taken the train for the east, and although on the westward journey it had been Jessica who had enjoyed things most, it was now Jessica who felt the heat and the fatigue, who looked so worn and pale that the others were concerned on her account,

She confessed to a headache; the rattle of the train bothered her. She could not rouse herself to take an interest in her fellow passengers, nor in the scenery through which they were passing. She had no joy nor pleasure in anything, and Gertrude was very anxious about her.

If only the long journey were at an end! Once or twice she talked over with Marion the advisability of getting off at the first stopping place and taking their chances of a good hotel, where they might stay until the little sister felt better.

"Better not," said Marion. "We might find ourselves in a worse plight than this. As it is, every hour is carrying us nearer to Quebec, and if Jessica is going to be ill, we shall be thankful that we are at home."

"Yes, indeed!" murmured Gertrude in entire acquiescence. "But the trouble is that the poor child has to bear all the misery of these noisy cars when she is feeling so bad."

Marion nodded in complete understanding. She went over to the seat by Jessica and talked to her in a beguiling fashion, finally persuading her to lie down and try to sleep.

All through the day the poor girl seemed to grow more ill; but she pleaded so hard that they would not stop that, against her better judgment, Gertrude decided that they would go to the end of the journey.

By the time Quebec was reached it was plain to everyone that Jessica was very ill, and it was a sad little company which drove up through the steep streets to the old house on Montcalm Mount. Jessica had to be carried upstairs, and Delia raced away in search of a doctor. There was terror on her face and in her heart, for she thought that Jessica was going to die, and to Delia, of all her sisters the little one was the dearest.

If the others thought and feared the same they were most careful to hide it, and they soothed the invalid with

all sorts of tender wiles as they rapidly undressed her and put her into the bed she had always been used to sharing with Gertrude.

"Oh, it is lovely to be at home!" sighed the poor girl. She turned so faint that they feared she was on the point of collapse.

Just then there was a quick run of feet on the stairs. Delia had found the doctor, and was coming back with him. A stern, grave man he was, who had attended Gertrude when she left the hospital the previous autumn.

"I cannot say yet what is the matter; another twenty-four hours may make it clearer," he said. As he looked into the faces of the two elder sisters he asked abruptly: "Are you able to nurse your sister? I mean, have you the leisure for it, or are you in situations?"

"We have the leisure," replied Gertrude quickly. "But if you think that trained nurses are necessary, we can afford to have them."

The doctor frowned, looking at her in surprise. "I thought that you were poor," he said brusquely. "I mean, I thought that you had to work hard for your living?"

"We did; but some money has come to us, and—and we do not have to work now," Gertrude answered. Her words were halting, and there was so much confusion in her manner that Marion watched her in surprise. As a rule Gertrude was so calm and self-possessed that this very apparent confusion was downright bewildering.

"There is no reason at present why you should not be able to do all that is required," the doctor said, nodding his head in token of understanding. He gave concise directions concerning the treatment of the patient, and went off, wondering a little at the look of fear which had leaped into the eyes of the nice-looking elder sister when she told him that they had had money left to them.

But he was too busy a man to have much time to spare

for speculating on what manifestly did not concern him, and straightway dismissed the matter from his mind.

He would have been very much amazed if he could have seen the picture which rose up before the eyes of Gertrude when she made her statement, for she had heard so plainly the bark of Bruno, and had felt the wind of the west stirring on her face, just as it had done that other day when on her ramble she had stumbled on the deserted camp, and had picked up the little book with the name of Douglas Amoyne written inside.

In accordance with the orders of the doctor, Gertrude had to go to bed at once, so that she might be fit to take the night nursing; and, as there would be no quiet for her in the sitting-room, she went down to the apartments of Mme Delarey, on the floor below, and tried to get some sleep.

But it seemed to her as if she would never close her eyes in slumber again, so painfully wideawake was she, listening and listening for some sound from the rooms above which should let her know how matters were going in the sick-room.

The doctor had not hidden from them the fact that Jessica was very ill. Indeed, he had rather emphasized it in order that they might not neglect the carrying out of his orders.

It was a night long to be remembered. Gertrude at least would never, never forget the agony of those hours of watching.

But it was only one night of many, and at the end of a week she and Marion were so worn out that it was necessary to have a trained nurse to help them. Tired out as they were, they would never have consented to this if the doctor had not pointed out to them that Jessica's life hung now upon the unceasing watchfulness and skill of the nurse,

With the coming of the trained help, Gertrude had time to think, and now it was being borne in upon her mind that Jessica would not get better unless she confessed the wrong she was doing in hiding her knowledge of Douglas Amoyne being still alive. Retribution had been swift to follow on her fault, and it had come in a very terrible guise.

Now it was her pride that was holding her back. She was realizing how very hard it would be to be obliged to proclaim her own wrongdoing in the matter. If she had come straight back from the deserted camp on the day of the find, and had told the girls of her discovery, she would have been spared the sense of personal humiliation which weighed so heavily upon her now.

"Oh, I can't speak of it, I can't!" she said to herself, with a shudder, one hot evening in September, as she ran up the steep flights of stairs after a duty walk in the fresh air. She hated those duty walks, but they had to be taken, just as food had to be eaten, so that she might be strong enough to do her part in taking care of Jessica. She had been away for an hour, and every minute of the time had been spent in that battle with herself concerning the telling of the secret which weighed so heavily on her heart.

It was nearly dark, for the days were shortening rapidly, and when she hastily entered the sitting-room she nearly stumbled over Marion, who was sitting on a chair just inside the door.

"Is Jessica worse?" demanded Gertrude in an awed whisper, and it seemed to her that she would not be surprised if Marion said that the little sister had already passed away.

"She is no better," replied Marion in a choked tone. "Nurse has just gone on duty, and she says that this state of things cannot go on much longer. If there is

no improvement, Jessica must collapse. And, Gertrude, I feel as if I could not bear it. I would rather die myself than go through this slow torture of seeing the little one taken away. I cannot bear to be in the room, I cannot endure the wistful look on her poor little face, and I feel as if I want to run away from sight and sound of the dreadful trouble that I cannot relieve."

"Hush!" said Gertrude sternly; "you must not make a noise. If you cannot control yourself, go downstairs to Mme Delarey's rooms. Anything is better than making a commotion here. Where is Delia?"

"She is in with Nurse. She said that Jessica liked to have her there, but I cannot bear it. Oh, Gertrude, I know that I am a coward, but pity me, we are not all brave and good, as you are!" Marion's head went down into her hands, as she swayed to and fro in her misery.

Gertrude caught her breath as if a blow had been struck her. She brave and good! Ah, the irony of it! She had done wrong, and was too cowardly to repent, while the price to be paid was the life of the little sister whom they loved so tenderly.

Should she confess now? It seemed to her at that moment that she almost might do it; but then came the thought of how Jessica would need every luxury and comfort that they could give her, if she pulled through this bad bit. Oh no, it would never do to throw away their inheritance just when they needed it most! Hardening her heart against that impulse to confession, she stooped to kiss Marion, bidding her be brave, as perhaps the worst was over; and with this poor attempt at comfort, which was too unconvincing to carry any sort of consolation with it, she walked across the sitting-room and softly entered the chamber where her sister lay.

The nurse was moving softly to and fro, and there was a worried look on her comely face which Gertrude was

quick to see and which gave her yet another pang. Put Delia was sitting by the bed slowly swinging a big fan, and smiling bravely while she talked to the poor sufferer who lay panting on the pillows.

"How are you now, dear?" Gertrude asked softly, as she came to stand within the range of Jessica's vision.

"I expect I am dying, for I don't feel as if I could live much longer," replied Jessica, speaking with difficulty.

A spasm of fear clutched at the heart of Gertrude. Her pride in herself seemed to give way, and it came to her with the most vivid clearness that she held the life of her sister in her own hands, and that Jessica might be saved even yet if only she herself were brave enough to confess the wrong she was doing in hiding her knowledge that her cousin was alive.

She stooped a little lower then, and her voice was tender and encouraging as she said: "I don't think that you are going to die, little sister. I fancy that you are going to start getting better this very night, for I have thought of a way to help you get well, only I can't tell you about it yet."

"Do you really think that I can get better?" asked Jessica faintly. She opened her languid eyes wider, as if trying to take in what her sister was saying so earnestly.

"Yes, I am sure of it. But you have got to try very hard yourself, of course, and I am going to try very hard too. Now, can you spare Delia to come with me for about ten minutes? Nurse will take care of you, and fan you while Delia is away."

"Why?" There was a petulant tone in the query, for Jessica always liked Delia to fan her, and she had been ill long enough to understand that it was pleasant to have a great deal of waiting upon from everyone.

"Because I want to start my plan of making you better

at once, and I cannot do it without the help of Delia." Gertrude was conscious that the nurse was surveying her with an amazed stare, and that Delia was also looking at her curiously. A dull red flush spread hotly over her face, and right up to the roots of her hair: it was part of her humiliation, but she was not going to draw back now.

"Go along, Delia, quick, for remember, I want to get better," said the invalid in a peremptory way, although the words were hardly above a whisper.

However, it was one point gained that she really believed Gertrude was going to make her better. So she was encouraged to do her own poor little best in the same direction, and, after all, the will to live is a mighty factor in the recovery of the very sick.

Delia rose and handed the fan to the nurse, then followed Gertrude out of the room, wondering as she went whether it was only some story with which Gertrude was trying to keep up the courage of the little girl, or whether there was really anything in it.

For Gertrude the brief passage from one room to the other was a journey so long that she seemed to be years older when the end of it was reached, and she stood in the familiar sitting-room, where already Marion had lighted the lamp on the centre table. Delia was looking at her with eager curiosity, waiting to know what it was that the wise elder sister had thought might help to restore the poor sick child on the other side of the closed door.

Marion on her part stood looking at the two who had just come from the bedroom, with such a horror in her eyes that Gertrude hastened to lift the burden of terrible apprehension that lay behind.

"Jessica is not worse. She is going to get better. I am sure of it, because I am going to tell you what I know."

"What do you mean?" demanded Marion fretfully; but Delia remained silent still, only now an expression of awe

was stealing over her face, for she had never seen Gertrude look like this before, and she could not think what was going to happen.

"I mean that some time ago I found we had no right to the money Uncle Joseph left behind. But because I wanted you all to have a good time, and plenty of advantages, I hid my knowledge. I should have hidden it still, only God has shown me that, if I still persist in my sin, Jessica's life will be forfeit."

For a moment there was a silence so profound in the room that the sound of people talking far down below in the street was distinctly audible through the open window.

"But how could you know that we had no right to the money? Has a will been found?" Marion fairly hurled the questions at her sister, and Delia stood with her mouth slightly open, breathing hard, as if she had been running.

"Not that I know of; but I have discovered that Douglas is alive." Gertrude's voice was steady enough now; the disgraceful fact of her hidden knowledge was out at last, she stood shamed for ever in the eyes of her sisters, or so she believed, and nothing else seemed to matter at all.

"Douglas Amoyne alive! Oh, I am glad!" cried Marion, with such a thrill of honest joy in her voice that Gertrude winced anew. Certainly it had not occurred to her to be glad when she had discovered her cousin.

"Then I suppose we shall be poor again, unless Douglas is disposed to help us a little," put in Delia, speaking for the first time.

"As if that mattered, if only we can keep Jessica!" cried Gertrude, flinging up her hands with an air of renunciation. It had meant so much to her to have money and the leisure which money brings, to be delivered from the ceaseless grind of working for her bread, and to be able to satisfy her thirst for knowledge, denied, alas! so long. But when weighed in the scale against her sister's

life that mattered not at all, and already, now that she had taken the first step, and humbled herself to the point of confession, everything else seemed easy.

"But can we keep her?" asked Marion in a dubious tone. She was not sensitive and highly strung as Gertrude was, and it would not have occurred to her to see any connection between the wrong which Gertrude had done and the serious illness that had fallen on Jessica.

"I am sure of it!" cried Gertrude, and the absolute conviction in her manner had its due effect on the others. "You see, I have been doing wrong, and hiding what should have been told, and our poor little girl has had to suffer for my sin. Oh, it is terrible that the innocent must suffer for the guilty! And yet perhaps, after all, I have suffered as much, in a way, as even Jessica, for she has not had the mental anguish to bear which has been my portion, and people can forget bodily pain when it is over."

"If you knew that it was your hiding of this knowledge which had made Jessica ill, why did you not speak before?" demanded Marion. She was still groping for a glimpse into the mind of her sister, and failing to get the light she needed to enable her to understand.

Gertrude shook her head with a helpless air. She could not make Marion understand, for it was not possible to put into words all that she was feeling about the matter. In fact it did not seem possible to explain any further, and, now that the deed had been done, she felt suddenly weak and languid from the mental strain.

"I cannot tell you how I know it," she answered wearily. "But you will see that Jessica will get better now. Indeed, the improvement had begun when I came out of the room. I had taken the first step to expiation then, by being willing to tell what I had been hiding so carefully."

"Gertrude, I think that you are the very pluckiest girl

that I ever saw!" cried Delia, with so much admiration in her tone as made Gertrude start as if from shock. It had been withering scorn she had expected to have from her sisters, and she had steeled her heart to meet it at least without wincing, judging it to be a part of the price she should pay for the wrong she had done. Yet here was Delia calling her brave!

"I am afraid that it is a miserable coward I have been," she said sadly, although already a tiny ray of hope was stealing into her heart. "I do not mind admitting that I was much more afraid to tell you than I am to go to Mr. Carson."

"Will you have to go to him? Oh, poor Gertrude!" and the sympathy in the voice of Marion was sweet indeed to the eldest sister.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for the way you have both taken this," she said brokenly. She was so ashamed of her want of self-control that she made a supreme effort to get herself in hand.

"Do you mean you thought we should make a fuss about having to work for our living again?" asked Marion.

"Partly that. But my worst fear was that you would cry out at my dreadful wickedness in hiding this thing that I had discovered," said Gertrude humbly. She had touched the very deepest depths of self-humiliation and abasement, and her suffering was in proportion to her pride.

"Poor dear!" cried Delia, coming close to her and rubbing her head against Gertrude's arm. "Why should we condemn you for doing what we might probably have done ourselves in your place? We might even have done worse, and destroyed the things which had the name on them, so that anyone else coming after would not have a chance to discover that there was anyone of the name in the neighbourhood."

"I am so puzzled that he should not have troubled to

claim his own inheritance—Douglas Amoyne, I mean," said Marion, with a frown. "He said that he was poor, and anxious to get the money the salvage people would give for the guarding of the wreck, and yet he has not troubled to find out whether his father left him any money. If he does not make the effort to insist upon his rights, why should we bother about it; and, chiefest of all, why should Gertrude make herself so miserable about it?"

Gertrude shivered. Her own wrong had never seemed so black to her as now, when she was listening to the excuses which Marion was making on her account. What Douglas Amoyne had done, or had not done, was of little moment. The only thing that mattered was that she should know her own conduct to be void of offence.

"He probably did not know that his father was dead," she answered quickly. "Oh, I am sure that he did not, for remember how very cheerful he was!"

"If one might judge the character of Uncle Joseph from the brief peeps that we have had of him, I should not think that his death would plunge anyone belonging to him into overwhelming grief," said Marion with a sarcastic inflection.

"I am so disappointed," wailed Delia. "He was such a kind sort of young man, so different from what we have been led to believe Cousin Douglas must have been. This one did not look dissipated, or drunken, or lazy. He was cheerful, happy, and strong—oh yes, he was strong, for he nearly pulled my arms out of joint when he was helping me on board that boat."

"The question is, what had I better do?" interrupted Gertrude, who, having got so far through her distressful task, was keenly anxious to finish it right off. "I am afraid that it is too late to see Mr. Carson to-night. Shall I write to him, or would it be better to go and see him to-morrow morning?"

"It would be horrid to go," answered Marion, with a shrug. "But of course it would be much simpler, because you would be able to answer all the questions he might want to ask, and so the business would be the sooner over. I will go with you, for it is not fair that you should have all the unpleasantness to face alone."

"It was I who found the things, and hid the knowledge," Gertrude reminded her.

But Marion gave her head an impatient toss. "If it had only been you who were concerned I guess there would have been no question of hiding. It was on our account chiefly that you were so anxious to keep the money, and since indirectly it was we who induced you to hold the thing secret, the least that we can do is to stand by you through the trouble."

"It is very good of you," murmured Gertrude. Her head was bowed very low as she spoke.

"It would be as well to write to Mr. Carson and make an appointment; then, if he is not able to see you, he can 'phone through in the morning," Marion said briskly. She moved the lamp nearer, and brought writing materials for Gertrude, after which Delia ran down and posted the letter.

How she shivered as she dropped it into the letterbox! It was like bidding goodbye to ease and prosperity, to everything which made life worth living and enjoying. For a moment she stood still on the pathway, sick and faint at the thought of all that they would have to renounce. Then suddenly she remembered Jessica, and Gertrude's belief that the little sister would get better now that the wrong had been confessed.

"It will be quite worth while being poor, if only Jessica gets well," she said. She was startled at the sound of her own voice, for she had not realized that she was speaking aloud.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Lifting of the Cloud

MR. CARSON looked from one sister to the other with unqualified amazement on his face.

When he had received Gertrude's letter that morning, asking for an interview as she had important information to give him, he had merely supposed that it was something about the European trip which was occupying her mind.

But when she came walking into the room where he saw his clients, he guessed from the set expression of her face that the information was something more serious than the planning of a pleasure trip. Marion was with her, and today the second sister was looking even more aggressive than usual. It was Marion's misfortune always to look fierce, very fierce, when she was nervous; and as she was more nervous than common this morning it followed as a natural sequence that she looked ready and willing to do battle with the whole world.

"Now, what is the matter?"

The kindly tones of the lawyer had made Gertrude start in a guilty fashion, for surely she did not deserve that anyone should treat her with such pleasant consideration. Mustering her courage with a great effort, she told him.

No wonder that he looked from one to the other in surprise. It had never occurred to him to doubt that the Liverpool solicitors knew what they were talking about, when they asserted that Douglas Amoyne was dead; and now to be told that the man was alive, that he had been

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seen and spoken to by the cousins whom his being alive would disinherit, was, to say the least, surprising—yes, and annoying too.

The lawyer did not trouble to hide the fact that it was annoying. To him it seemed far better that these four girls should have the money, and use it wisely, than that the wastrel son who had nearly broken his father's heart should have it to fling away in dissipation. But of course he could not say all this. So he looked—as he felt—annoyed.

The trouble was that Gertrude believed the expression of his face was the outcome of the feeling with which he regarded her action in having hidden her knowledge of her cousin being alive. Of course she might have told him this and yet have kept back the fact of her own endeavour to conceal what she knew. But that would not have marched with her ideas of what was strictly upright, and at all cost to herself she had to make a clean breast of the affair.

It was Marion who broke the silence which had dropped upon the group after Gertrude had told her story.

"Shall we have to replace all the money we have spent this summer?"

"What money?" asked Mr. Carson, looking at her in surprise, and, truth to tell, frowning worse than ever.

"All that has been advanced to us from Uncle Joseph's estate, I mean," she answered.

"Of course not," he said harshly. The roughness of his tone was not meant for them, but simply and solely for the unkind fate which had decreed that Douglas Amoyne should still be alive. "You did not know that you were not rightly entitled to it. The responsibility lies with Messrs. Freeman & Willis, although, I suppose, even they were not to blame, since they obtained a legal decree that Douglas Amoyne was dead. But as you have given

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information of his whereabouts you are of course entitled to the reward."

"What reward?" asked Gertrude, staring blankly at him.

"Do you not remember that a reward of a thousand dollars was offered by your late uncle for news of his son's whereabouts or information of his death? That money will come to you for bringing tidings of his whereabouts, and, although it is of course a very poor substitute for what you will have to relinquish, it is better than nothing, and with care it will start you in some business where you may earn your living more easily than by having to depend on any casual situation, which might be all that you would be able to get."

Gertrude nodded, but without conviction. There was no plan in her mind whereby a paying business could be secured with that amount of capital. She was deeply grateful for the kindly interest which Mr. Carson showed in her welfare, but just at present she felt too strained by all that she had gone through to be able to arrange her future even in thought.

"Oh, Gertrude, if we can be sure of so much money, do let us buy The Welcome Home! You know that Mrs. M'Whortle said that W. W. would be glad to get five hundred dollars for it as it stands; and I am sure that we could make a living there. I do not mind how hard I work, and neither does Delia, but I cannot face going back to the tea-shop."

"What is The Welcome Home—a saloon, or a restaurant?" asked Mr. Carson in a puzzled tone. Surely these girls would not dream of taking a place of public entertainment? But he had always felt that in matters of refinement and culture Gertrude was head and shoulders above the other girls.

Gertrude hastened to reassure him. "The Welcome

Home is a deserted farm in the district of Poplar Ridge. My sisters took a great liking to the place. I cannot say that it had much attraction for me, especially as the previous owner had ended his life by his own hand, poor man, and that had helped to give the farm a sinister reputation."

"It would take something off the price too, without doubt," said Mr. Carson. "Anyway, it is a good suggestion. A scheme of that sort would at least give you a chance of all keeping together. It would be a healthy life for the younger ones, and you would be more independent than if you were in situations."

"I should love it!" cried Marion. "So would Delia and Jessica; but I am afraid it would be rather hard on Gertrude, who is not so keen on farming as the rest of us."

"I am keen on anything that will give us a home and a chance to keep together," the elder sister replied. Suddenly it was borne in upon her that she would have to go back to the place of failure, the spot where she had committed her wrong of hiding, and there she would have to begin afresh.

"Would you like me to write and enquire about this farm for you?" Mr. Carson asked. "I have an agent in the west, a man upon whom I can thoroughly depend. He would see that you made no mistake in your purchase. And you do not require me to tell you that the sooner you can settle into something the better it will be for you."

"We should be very glad if you would do so," said Gertrude, feeling as if the ordering of things had suddenly been taken from her, and so a great burden had been lifted. "Will you also write to Messrs. Freeman & Willis for us, as of course they must be told at once?"

"Yes, I will put everything in train," he said kindly. He asked how Jessica was, for Gertrude had told him in her letter that the youngest sister was ill.

"The doctor thinks that she is a little better this morning—she had a quieter night," Gertrude answered. Presently the two sisters took their leave, and went down in the lift to the busy street below.

There was no chance to talk on the way home, for they went by a crowded electric car, with the gossip and laughter of happy, irresponsible people all around them, the well-to-do part of the population, who were riding from one shopping centre to another, and seemed only concerned to get the full value of pleasure out of their day.

But when they had left the car, and were going up through the steep, narrow streets which led to Montcalm Mount, Marion burst into eager speech.

"Oh, Gertrude, will you hate it very much, dear, if we go back to the west? I will do all the hardest work myself, and it will be so good to be able to keep together still."

"I shall not hate it at all if it makes the rest of you happy," Gertrude answered. "It was more on your account than my own that I was so sorry to lose the money, for it was beautiful to think that you need not have to toil so hard for a living." A swift pang of regret passed through her for the beautiful life of leisure, the gates of which had closed behind them.

"Oh, I love work and striving!" laughed Marion. "I do not think that I was cut out for belonging to what people are pleased to call the leisured classes, although so far as I have ever seen or read of them that sort of people work as hard in pursuit of pleasure as poorer folks work for bread. Oh, it is a funny world! But if we can get *The Welcome Home*, and Jessica grows stronger, I do not think we shall have much to grumble about."

"That is how I feel," said Gertrude, forcing back her regrets and bracing herself to look forward to the new life with what cheer she might. After all, it was the happiness of the many which mattered most, and her own shrinking

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from the prospect would vanish if she saw that her sisters were satisfied.

The nurse had remained on duty long after her usual time, so that Gertrude and Marion might be free to go to Mr. Carson. But she went away to bed directly Gertrude reached home, and so the care of the invalid absorbed them for the next few hours, and they could not make plans or discuss problems before Jessica in the present state of affairs.

Delia had been sent out for a walk, and the two big rooms at the top of the tall old house were very quiet while the hours of the sunny September morning slipped away.

There was certainly a change in the condition of Jessica this morning; she lay so quiet, with all the trouble and restlessness gone.

Marion thought that she was in a state of collapse, and was anxious accordingly. But to Gertrude the alteration was just what she had expected to take place. Jessica was going to get better, she was sure of it. The evil spirit of unrest which had so tortured the poor child had vanished. It was as if a miracle had been performed, and she was not going to doubt now that the answer to her prayers had come quickly.

Never before had she realized the true meaning of peace of heart. It was the blessed relief of calm after storm, rest after striving. So long as she lived, Gertrude would never forget that morning after her confession had been made, or the joy that came to her in the midst of the crowding anxieties of the day.

It was a lifting of the cloud. Things were growing clearer already. If it was right for her to go back west, to the place where she had failed, then she would go with a steadfast heart, and she would do her very best that the others should never see a shadow of regret on her face or in her manner.

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Jessica dropped into a gentle sleep about noon—natural sleep which had been impossible to her through so many weary days. The other two crept gently into the next room then, leaving the door open, so that they could hear the slightest sound which the invalid might make, but far enough removed that their whispered talk might not keep her from the sleep which was so blessed and healing.

“There are two bedrooms in the house, and such a nice big sitting-room!” broke out Marion with ecstasy in her voice. With a start Gertrude realized that it was The Welcome Home that her sister was talking about.

“Marion, I had no idea that your happiness was really bound up in that little deserted farmhouse, or we would have had a try to get it before,” said Gertrude. She thought of how she herself had sinned to bring her sisters happiness, when all the time one of them at least asked nothing better of life than the chance to live on a lonely farm and work hard for the daily bread.

“I was only biding my time,” replied Marion simply. “Of course it was of no use for me to make a fuss and upset the plans of everyone else while I was under age. But I had determined that when I was twenty-one I would ask for a certain amount of money just to start me, and then I would settle down to work in earnest. I suppose that I have got the love of the land in my blood. There seems nothing half so well worth having as a bit of ground that one may call one’s own, and the health and strength to make things grow upon it.”

“You will make a fine farmer,” said Gertrude, and went on, with a laugh: “but I fancy that you will find me very useful in keeping accounts, for you were never great at that, you know.”

“Speaking of accounts,” burst out Marion, with a start, “I wonder if they have got the butter factory into anything like going order yet. Would it not be a good idea if you

could run that thing and keep the accounts there, Gertrude? You have always been a sort of genius at addition and subtraction."

"I should fancy that they would want a practical person who would be able to understand the butter part of the proceedings," Gertrude answered; "and, never having been inside a butter factory in my life, I can't be said to know much of the work." Then she began to talk of something else.

But the idea remained with her; over and over again, before the end of the day, it was destined to haunt her, and the more she thought of it the more feasible it seemed.

If necessary she would spend a month in a butter factory, to learn how to manage, and certainly she would, as Marion said, be able to keep the accounts. The people of Poplar Ridge would not be able to pay a salary, but they would be quite willing to allow a percentage on sales once the factory was in going order. She could also have Delia for a helper, and Delia's experience in the milk store would be all for good, since it had been the way in that place of business always to have the cream left over from the day's sales made up into butter that same night, and it was mostly Delia's work to do it.

That evening, when the nurse came on duty again, Gertrude wrote a letter to Mrs. M'Whortle, and went out and posted it. She said nothing to the others about it. Indeed, after it was written she would have recalled it if she could; but it was then happily too late, and so she had to try to feel as easy in her mind about it as possible. She had told the worthy Scotswoman that life had altered for them, and in future they would have to work for their living. She said that her sisters were very keen on taking a farm in the district of Poplar Ridge, but that it did not seem to her as if there would be work enough for four of them on that one little farm, and if she could get occupa-

tion outside, which would still enable her to live at home, she would be very glad to take it. She suggested that if they were still thinking of starting a butter factory she would be very glad to run it for them, taking a percentage of profits on sales instead of a salary.

No wonder she repented of the letter after it was written, for, viewed in the light of second thoughts, it seemed about the wildest thing that could possibly have been suggested. Yet in her heart she knew that she could do the work, and do it well, if only she had the chance.

Jessica was still better on the next day, and the doctor was rubbing his hands in gleeful self-congratulation on having been skilful enough to allay that spirit of unrest which seemed to be sapping the life and energy of the poor girl. The nurse on her part was disposed to take a great deal of the credit to herself, believing that it was her intense devotion to the case which had wrought the miracle. But Gertrude knew in her own heart that Jessica's life was the reward given to her for the confession of her wrong. Although she said no word about it, and would never have thought of making any mention of it to nurse or doctor, her belief was too deep and well grounded for her to have any hesitation in the matter.

It would be a few weeks before things could be settled, as it would take a little time for Mr. Carson's agent to make enquiry about the purchase of The Welcome Home, and there was also the waiting to hear what the Liverpool lawyers would have to say on the matter. But a little breathing space was a very welcome thing at the present time, and nothing could be done until Jessica was strong enough to be moved.

So far they were not pressed for money for their immediate wants. They had not nearly exhausted the sums already received from their uncle's estate, for their summer expenditure had been very low, thanks to the life in camp.

There was no question of this money being required at their hands—so Mr. Carson told them—as it had been paid before anyone realized that Douglas Amoyne was still alive.

Through the shortening days of autumn the three elder girls worked hard at getting things ready for their new venture. They made garments for themselves which would be suitable for the new life they would have to lead, and while they worked they talked and planned, just as they had talked and planned in the summer. Only then they had planned for the European tour, and now they were planning how best to manage so that they might have a home and a living, and yet be able to keep together.

The dread of separation was the pathetic part of it. It had been the terror of their poverty in the past, just as it would be the dread of the future. Nothing seemed too hard if only they might be together.

In the midst of their work and planning came a letter from Mrs. M'Whortle—such a funny mixture of regret and rejoicing. The regret, of course, was because they were no longer rich, while the rejoicing was because the four wanted to go back to the place where already there were friends who would welcome their coming.

Gertrude's offer to run the butter factory, and to make her profit out of the sales, was promptly accepted by the committee, and she would have been quite flattered by their eager desire for her to come if it had not been for the uncompromising character of the Scotswoman's letter.

Mrs. M'Whortle said that the chief trouble in making a start had been because they could get no one to undertake to run the concern for them except at a salary which it was quite beyond the power of the committee to guarantee. But if Miss Amoyne was willing to make her own salary, why, the thing could be started straight away. Enough people had guaranteed money to provide the necessary

plant for beginning in a small way, and if only they could get an assistant who would work on the same terms as Gertrude offered to do, why, there was no doubt that the affair would go swimmingly.

"It is all fitting in most beautifully, and if only we can get that farm we shall be sure to do well," said Marion, when the letter had been read and discussed in family council.

"Shall I have to keep house and wash the dishes?" asked Jessica, with a pout. She was thin and shadowy from her illness still, and very much inclined to be petulant, which was, of course, the result of her weakness. But her sisters always forgave her little displays of peevishness, remembering, as they did, how sorely they had suffered when it seemed as if they were to lose her.

"No, you will have to cook food for the pigs and feed the very tiny chickens when they are hatched." Marion was laughing as she spoke, and the others all joined in at the face of disgust Jessica made at this information.

"I would rather nurse babies than chickens," she answered. "And you will have to feed the pigs yourself; for you know how you used to say when you were at the tea-shop that you would rather feed four-legged pigs than those which walked about on two legs."

"Yes, you did that, Marion, and now we shall see if you really prefer the natural swine to the unnatural," chimed in Delia.

## CHAPTER XV

### The New Home

A STEADY rain was falling, drip, drip, drip. The trail was a quagmire, and it seemed only a question of time how soon the wagon would be stuck so fast that even the three sturdy horses would not be strong enough to haul it out again.

Victor Green shouted encouragement and abuse at the horses until he was nearly hoarse. But the four figures crouching under two umbrellas, and surrounded by packages, boxes, bags, and bundles, said nothing at all. Time enough for them to talk when something was to be gained by speech. Just at present it seemed easier to keep silence.

Despite the weather the boy appeared to be in radiant spirits, and he kept throwing remarks over his shoulder in the intervals of shouting at the horses, and did not seem to mind in the least because he received no replies worth mentioning.

"See that?" he yelled, pointing with his whip away into the murk of falling rain. "You can get a very good view from here right across to Clamping Bay, and see just where we had such fun at your picnic last summer. That was something like a treat! The only holiday I have had since last Christmas. But I guess that it would not be very pleasant camping on the shore in this weather. I would rather live at "The Welcome Home", and that is saying a good lot. My word, but I reckon you are

plucky to go and live at that place! I should be downright scared to do it!"

"What is there to be afraid of?" demanded Marion tartly. It did not please her that Delia and Jessica should hear anyone talk in such a fashion, especially in this dreary weather, which was enough to get on one's nerves without anything else. She felt that she would enjoy shaking the irrepressible boy who occupied the driving seat, and she wished, oh, how she wished, that she had driven the horses over herself!

"Well," admitted Victor in what he fondly believed to be a real Yankee drawl, "I don't know as there is anything to be scared of. It is more the feeling of it, don't you know. But if the place suits you there is no need for anyone to trouble about it. I expect, though, that you will need to sleep under your umbrellas when it is storming like this morning."

"But hasn't the roof been mended?" asked Gertrude in dismay. "I wrote to Mr. Washington about it three weeks ago, because the agent said that it leaked."

"I know," Victor nodded his head in sagacious fashion. "Old W. W. said that he'd see to doing it straight away, and he even looked out a load of shingles and sent them across to the place. Then someone came along and wanted to see him about a farm what had been abandoned on South Fork, so the roof didn't get mended that day, and it hasn't got mended since."

"Oh, what a dreadful business! Whatever shall we do?" Gertrude looked at Marion with dismay in her eyes. It was strange how she had come to depend on her sister in these days since they had once more to face the world on their own account.

Marion forced a laugh which even her praiseworthy efforts could not make cheerful, and answered brusquely: "The most effectual way will be to do it ourselves. We

shall have to camp in the driest places until it is fine again, and then we will stop the rain out somehow."

"Yes, that will be the best thing," said Gertrude, who was not going to be outdone in courage, although she might have to go to Marion for advice and consolation occasionally.

"There it is; home at last, The Welcome Home!" shouted Delia, giving the umbrella a flourish which sent a cascade of raindrops on to the face of Jessica.

"You might be a little careful with that umbrella," said the little girl in a petulant tone. Then she cried out in a delighted tone: "Why, there is smoke coming from the chimney, and see what a nice clean curtain there is at the window!"

Squelch into a hole went the wagon at this minute. There was a heavy lurch to one side, and a chorus of cries broke from the girls, for they thought that they were all going to be pitched into the mud together.

But Victor rose to the occasion in a way worthy of his colonial upbringing. The lash curled promptly along the side of the fore horse, and was accompanied by such a terrific yell as made the three animals start forward with such a jerk that the wagon was out of the hole and had righted itself in a moment. The danger of being pitched out was past, and everyone breathed freely once more.

Just at that moment the door of the little weather-beaten farm-house flew open, and the figure of Mrs. M'Whortle appeared on the threshold. She was rather dirty, her hair was flying in scraggy ends all over her head, but she was smiling broadly, and the way she stretched out her hands in greeting was enough to bring a lump to the throats of each one of the four girls who had come to make home in this dreary place—for dreary indeed it looked under the steady slant of the rain.

They shouted in greeting to Mrs. M'Whortle as the

wagon floundered into another mudhole, and at the sound of their voices there was a wild barking from within the house, and Bruno dashed out, nearly upsetting the Scots-woman as he came. He fairly hurled himself at the wagon in a transport of delight.

"Poor old dog, good old fellow! I declare it is worth arriving in the rain to have a welcome like this!" cried Gertrude. The moisture on her cheeks was not all due to rain as she stooped to pat the dog which was giving them such a riotous welcome.

"Look here, young man, I want to know why those shingles were not fixed on the roof last week?" demanded Mrs. M'Whortle, addressing Victor with great asperity, when the four passengers had been safely deposited on the ground.

"You must ask W. W. that question, for it was his business, not mine," replied Victor cheerfully. "Is the rain coming in very bad?" he asked in friendly concern.

"I should just think it is. Why, the bedrooms are not habitable, and what the young ladies will do for the night is more than I can say," snorted the good woman. Dashing out into the rain she began to haul the bags and bundles out of the wagon.

Victor looked thoughtful. "Got a ladder?" he asked briefly, as he swung a trunk to the ground that was nearly as big as himself.

"There is a ladder of a sort in the barn," returned Mrs. M'Whortle; "but it is not what I should like to trust myself upon. I really believe that I should have taken a hand at the broken roof myself, only the mother of a family is too valuable to risk on a rotten thing like that."

"Well, seeing that I only weigh about half as much as you, and that I'm not the mother of the family either, I will climb up and fix those shingles myself now I am here," said Victor. Dropping his manly tone he asked, with a

positive whine: "Did you say that the ladder was in the barn?"

"Afraid, are you?" laughed the Scotswoman with kindly toleration. Having such a tribe of children herself, she quite understood how scared even the most valiant might be at little silly things like the fear and dread of entering the barn where poor old Anthony Bream had ended his miserable life.

"I will go with you to get the ladder," said Delia, who was clad in a stout mackintosh down to her heels, and had a cap of the same over her hair.

"You might unhitch the horses and put them in the barn for an hour, then there will be no danger of their getting cold from standing," said Gertrude, turning back as she was entering the door of the house, to make the suggestion. She would have gone to help in the unhitching, but Mrs. M'Whortle was summoning her inside with a flourish of a bony arm, and there was Jessica to be looked after, and, truth to tell, comforted likewise.

It was Jessica who was Gertrude's great trouble at this particular time. The little girl was in a condition of continual revolt against the poverty which had come upon them, and sometimes the things she said to her seniors on the subject were very hard to be borne.

She openly blamed them for having declared their knowledge of Douglas Amoyne being alive, and she was so dissatisfied with everything which was done that it took the combined patience of the three elders to bear with her moods. The doctor had warned them that she might be rather unreasonable and irritable for a few months, until her strength was fully restored, and they could only bear with her moods, trusting to time to make her more reasonable.

She had been so hard upon Gertrude, whom she considered most to blame in the matter of the discovery which

had led to their second descent into poverty, and Gertrude had plainly felt the unkindness so keenly, that Marion had bluntly told Jessica that the confession had been the means of giving her back her life. Since then the little girl had refrained from violent outbursts, and had contented herself with petulant sighing for the easy times that had gone.

The door opened straight into a fair-sized room, which would have to be dining-room, kitchen, and drawing-room combined. There was a medley of packing-cases, bags, and bundles here; but the floor had been cleaned, the rusty stove had been turned into a brilliant black, and a good fire was roaring up the pipe.

"Oh, how kind of you to come and make the place habitable!" exclaimed Gertrude, turning to the kindly woman with so much feeling in face and manner that Mrs. M'Whortle reached out a coarse and not overclean hand to pat her on the shoulder.

"A great pleasure, my dear; and to work in the house of anyone else is something like a holiday. The different buckets and brooms are like a change of scene, don't you see, and even the dirt to be cleaned up is different from the everyday lot at home."

"I should think it was different," said Gertrude, and now she laughed in spite of herself, for Mrs. M'Whortle's place was rigidly and spotlessly clean, and to compare her trim house with this neglected ruin, which had stood empty for two years or so, was really comical.

Jessica had been making little bird-like darts here and there, exclaiming at this and groaning at that. Now she had disappeared in the direction of the bedrooms. Marion was helping to bring the bundles in from the wagon, and so Gertrude was momentarily alone in the kitchen.

A wave of something which was uncommonly like homesickness had risen up in her throat and nearly choked her,

She was thinking of those two big rooms on the top floor of the old house on Montcalm Mount, and wishing, wishing, wishing that the wave of a fairy wand would transplant her back there, when Delia came bursting in at the door full of loud-voiced rejoicing over this house which was their very own.

"Oh, Gertrude, what a mercy it was that you stumbled on that deserted camp and found out that it was Douglas Amoyne who was camping there! Just figure to yourself how much harder it would have been if someone else had spotted our dear cousin's whereabouts, because then the someone else would have had the reward, and we should have had to go without it!"

"Yes, things are never so bad that they might not be worse," Gertrude answered, looking up with a sudden smile. She was thinking how foolish it was to look back, when the looking could bring nothing but pain; and she turned round with an energetic movement to do the next thing, because it was work which would most surely banish melancholy.

Just then Jessica came hurrying back from the bedrooms with a very doleful expression of face.

"Oh, Gertrude, this is a horrid house! The rain is dripping through the ceilings of both bedrooms, and the floors are all green and mouldy with the wet."

"Never mind, dear; we will have the roof mended, and then the floors will dry up very quickly. We can even bring our beds and sleep round the stove to-night. What a good thing it is that this end of the roof is sound! It would have been so much worse if the rain had been dropping through this ceiling."

Gertrude's air was so determinedly cheerful that Jessica was silenced for a few minutes. She sat down on a box by the stove to watch what the others were doing, but she did not offer any assistance. She did not feel in the

mood for exertion just then, and she was so much the spoiled darling of the family that she never did things unless she felt inclined.

"I've got the ladder reared," said Victor Green, putting his head in at the door. "Have one of you got time to lend me a hand with the shingles?"

"I will!" announced Marion gleefully. She was prepared to do anything, even to mounting the ladder and fixing the shingles herself if necessary.

But it was Gertrude who interposed with a suggestion. "Marion, Mrs. M'Whortle says that our tents are still here in the barn. Do you not think that one of those tied over the roof for the present will be the best plan? No one can mend shingles properly in wet weather, and I fancy that the repairs will have to be pretty extensive to make a sound job of it. But a canvas spread over and tied securely down to the eaves would keep out the rain."

"Gertrude, you are a genius, and nothing short of it!" cried Marion. "Of course, the canvas will be the very thing. It will keep us dry until we can have a shingle bee. Oh, I do not intend to pay for labour if we can get our neighbours to come and help us for nothing but their food! Every dollar of ready money that we can save will be an advantage, you see. Now, come and help with that canvas, will you? It will take the united strength of everyone present to get it fixed properly, for that ladder is fearfully shaky, and, although it may bear the weight of Victor Green alone, I won't answer for it if the burden of the canvas is added to it."

Gertrude, Delia, and Mrs. M'Whortle all rushed off to the barn, followed by Bruno, to get the canvas ready. Then, bringing it out to the rain, they laid it in front of the house, and, handing the long cords to Victor, told him to go up the ladder and throw them over the ridge of the roof.

When the cords were hanging down on the other side came the real hard work, for the great sheet of canvas had to be hauled up by sheer strength of arm, dragged right over the ridge, and fastened down so that it covered the bad places in the shingling. Then some of the new shingles were lashed to the edge, and the whole tied down in the most workmanlike manner, so the wet was kept out.

All this work took time, and when it was done Mrs. M'Whortle said that she must be going, for she had a lot of work to do at home. Victor offered to drive her, as it would not take him far out of his way, and it would save her a very wet and muddy walk."

"Very well; I have only my scrubbing-brush to get," said the good woman, and then she dived in at the door of the house for the brush which she had brought from her own place and had wielded so unweariedly in the interests of her friends.

As she buttoned her raincoat tighter round her, before getting up in the wagon, she said in a hurried aside to Gertrude: "The little one is going on rather badly in yonder, but you will be wise not to take too much notice of her. She is but young, poor thing, and weak from her illness, so it stands to reason that she would not feel so kindly about these changes as the rest of you."

Gertrude nodded, and turned away without a word. There was no need to warn her to be gentle with Jessica, for she was never anything else; and when Marion declared that the child wanted rousing out of the selfish ways into which she was falling, Gertrude always said that it was better to let her alone until strength and energy came back.

The sound of sobbing met her before ever she crossed the threshold, and when she entered the muddled room, which was as full of all sorts of litter as it could be, she found that Jessica was crying with hysterical vehemence.

"Don't you feel well, darling?" she asked tenderly.

"I expect that I shall soon be ill again if I have to live in this horrid place," wailed Jessica. "But just at present I am so hungry that I do not know what to do."

"I think that we are all hungry, and now that we have got the roof covered in we can see about having a meal," replied Gertrude, with a bounding relief at her heart because of Jessica's naïve admission regarding her hunger. It had been so difficult to induce her to take food, and she had got into the habit of turning away from her meals with an air of bored disgust which was fearfully hard to bear. If once she began to feel hungry it was a sign that she was really getting stronger again.

"How can we have food in all this muddle?" she asked with a petulant ring in her tone.

"The muddle will not look so bad after we have satisfied our hunger. Reach me the coffee-pot, dear. There it is in that bag yonder. Mrs. M'Whortle said that she had brought in a bucket of drinking water, so we can soon have the coffee made, and there is nothing so comforting in a confusion like this as a good cup of coffee. We have plenty of sandwiches and things in our food box, and so we shall do very well. We can have a royal supper to-night when the work is done. I want to reduce this confusion this afternoon, for we shall not be able to do anything properly until we get our house in order."

Jessica sighed in a dismal fashion, as if her sister's energy rather got upon her nerves; but she found the coffee-pot, filled it from the supply of water so thoughtfully provided by Mrs. M'Whortle, and set it on the stove to boil. The trouble was that she did everything with such an air of resignation, an affectation of a martyr spirit, which made Marion privately declare to Gertrude that she would enjoy slapping her.

Even the smell of the coffee when it was ready seemed

to put a different complexion on matters, and the four girls looked quite cheerful when they gathered round the stove for a scrambled feed. Each one sat on a bundle, or a box, or a packing-case, or anything else which came handy. Indeed they had no furniture at all in the house except the camp equipment which had been stored at the M'Whortle homestead when they went east. It would have been sold, only there was no one to buy it just then, and Gertrude had been in such desperate haste to shake the dust of Clamping Bay from her feet.

The furniture from their two attic rooms in Quebec had been sold, for it did not seem worth the freightage across so many miles of country. For the present they had decided that they could do very well with the comfortable camp-chairs and beds which so fortunately remained their own property, and these had been brought from the M'Whortles' place and dumped down in the house ready for use.

Both Marion and Gertrude decided that the bedrooms were too damp for sleeping in on this first night, so they determined to sleep in the kitchen, where the warm comfort of the stove would take away any danger of catching cold.

"We will have all the beds pointing feet to the fire," said Delia, "because that is the way people always sleep in camp. At least they do in adventure stories."

"Oh yes! we will have our feet to the fire by all means," laughed Gertrude. "But the desperate part of the business is that we forgot to bring a lamp with us from Poplar Ridge, and so our only means of illumination is that hurricane lantern which we had in camp."

"And which always smelled so abominably," groaned Marion. "Let us go to bed at once, before the atmosphere gets unbearable. I vote that we have Bruno indoors to-night, then he will not make darkness hideous by howl-

ing round the house and scaring us all into fits in the middle of our first sleep."

"I wonder if Bruno realizes that he has come home for good!" said Delia sleepily as the dog was admitted, and, after making a great fuss over each one of the four in turn, went to lie down behind the stove with the air of being in an accustomed place.

"I expect the old fellow knows when he is comfortable," answered Gertrude. She turned the talk with all speed, for she had no desire for Jessica to get brooding on the ancient history of their new home at this time of night. The little girl was so imaginative and excitable that they always tried to keep her mind on strictly normal subjects when bedtime came.

They were all so tired that there was certainly no use in staying up any longer, especially as they had no light to do anything with. So they went to bed directly supper was over, and lay down for their night's rest wrapped in rugs, and thinking how much it was like being in camp, and yet how different.

It was still raining, and the wind came moaning through the naked boughs of the orchard trees, making weird sobbing noises. Once or twice the old dog lifted his head and growled, but there seemed no reason for it beyond his own fancy, and so the night passed away.

## CHAPTER XVI

### To Make a Living

"HURRAH, the sun is shining!" cried Delia, who was the first to wake the next morning.

"Hush, hush! don't talk about it, for I am quite positive that no farmer ought to lie in bed in October until the sun is high enough to shine in her eyes," laughed Marion, rolling off her camp-bed in a hurry, and proceeding to make a very rapid toilet.

"We cannot be said to be farmers until we get things started a little," said Gertrude, who was also dressing with dispatch, for the work in front of them was pressing, and it would not do to waste daylight hours in bed.

"How much more cheerful things look in the daylight!" exclaimed Delia, who had opened the house door to let in plenty of fresh air. "Why, this is quite a pretty place in the morning; the view across the orchard looks so nice, and see how the leaves on that beech tree yonder flame in the sunshine!"

"Yes, it is pretty, or will be when we get it tidy," answered Marion, coming to stand at the door to let the keen cold air of the morning stir her into greater wakefulness, although she was still only half-dressed. "I shall just love working to get the place trim, and to keep it so. I only wish that it were a little nearer to the factory for you, Gertrude; that two miles night and morning will be a trial in bad weather."

"We cannot have everything," replied Gertrude, "and the factory will be more central where it is for the rest of the district than if it were down here." She had stuck a hand mirror up against a saucepan, and was doing her hair as best she could.

"The two miles will be rather a nice little jaunt if only we have a beast of some sort to drive," said Delia. "Shall we be able to manage it, do you think?" She was also doing her hair, only without the aid of any mirror.

"We must manage it; because after we have cows here we shall have our own cream to take to the factory, don't you see?" answered her sister. They fell into a discussion of ways and means, which lasted until the toilets were all completed and the bedding had been rolled up to be out of the way.

Ever since Gertrude's offer to run the factory had been accepted she had been working at a factory on the outskirts of Quebec, in order that she might gain experience and understand what sort of machinery was most necessary to the success of the venture.

A little common sense had shown her that it was absolutely unnecessary to start with an expensive plant; that could easily be installed when the factory began to pay. The present season was also not the best time to set about gathering cream from a district the farmers of which were in the habit of having their milk supply drop almost to nothing in the winter months.

But it was better to start with a little, and to get used to the work, than to have a large supply and muddle it through want of experience. So a week hence the factory was to be put into operation. The intervening time would give Gertrude a chance to make a round of such homesteaders as had not yet promised to support the new venture, and in view of this travelling from farm to farm a horse and trap became the first necessity.

Fortunately to-day was as fine as yesterday was wet, and, leaving Marion and Jessica to wrestle with the work of getting the house into something like order, Gertrude and Delia walked over to M'Whortle's place to borrow a horse and wagon.

Having been used to horses from childhood, Gertrude was not scared at the spirited animal which she and Delia harnessed to the M'Whortle wagon because there were no men about the place just then to do it for them. The creature reared on its hind legs, and pawed the air in a fearsome manner with its fore feet; then down it came with a bounce, to start kicking; but just then Delia stuffed an apple in its mouth, which so amazed it that a moment's peace was the result. Gertrude took instant advantage of this to get the collar on, and when that was done the work of hitching up was child's-play.

Mrs. M'Whortle looked on and applauded from the distance; but she had a wholesome fear of skittish horses, and did not deem that her duty to her neighbour entailed risking, if not life and limb, at least peace of mind, in getting too near the prancing beast.

"I shall tell my man that he need not be afraid to trust you with Toby after this," exclaimed the good woman in admiring tones. "My word, I never saw girls handle a horse in a smarter fashion!" Then she plunged her arms into the soapsuds again, and worked away with tremendous vigour.

"Now that is accomplished, and we can set out," said Gertrude, with a sigh of extreme satisfaction, when the hitching process was complete, and she and Delia were ready to mount to the wagon seat.

"It is funny how awkward some horses are about being harnessed, and it is a great nuisance too. Before you buy a horse, Gertrude, I am going to harness the beast, and if it çuts so many capers we will not have it, for we cannot

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afford to waste valuable time in dealing with refractory creatures when business presses."

"Perhaps business won't press—not yet awhile, that is," Gertrude answered ruefully.

"We have got to make it press, or so I take it. Of course it won't press if we just sit in that factory and wait for the people to send their cream. What we have to do is to hustle round, and make them feel that it is to their advantage to send their stuff along to such up-to-date people as we are."

"Will you go in and interview the people here, or shall I go?" asked Gertrude, when they reached the first farm on their calling list.

"You take the first one and I will take the second. We share the work; only, as you are the senior, of course you must have the first chance; but if your eloquence gives out you can depend on me to come to the rescue."

"That is kind; but, oh dear, it does not look very hopeful, and I do not believe that there is a cow on the place!" sighed Gertrude, as she prepared to descend from the wagon before the door of the house, which had a look of being deserted.

"It does not always do to trust to appearances; "and, ah, listen to that!" exclaimed Delia, as a plaintive "moo" sounded from the barn.

A few moments of active knocking, and then Gertrude opened the door and peered in. Cold and damp and indescribably stuffy was the room into which the door opened, and she stood back a minute to let the air blow in behind her.

"Come in, please!" said a woman's voice from the inner room, the door of which was shut.

Seeing that it was a woman's voice, Gertrude crossed the floor without a moment's hesitation, and, pushing open the door, walked into the bedroom,

There, on a much-tumbled bed, lay a woman who was young, and might have been nice-looking if she had not been so untidy and so very evidently ill.

"What is the matter?" asked Gertrude, coming to stand close beside the bed, and looking down upon her with great compassion.

"I am ill. I can't get across to the barn to see to the creatures. My man is away, and I think that God Himself must have sent you, for I have been lying here and praying for help!" gasped the woman. This was followed by such a fit of gasping and choking that Gertrude was badly frightened, fearing that the poor thing was going to die then and there.

There was nothing that Gertrude could do for the moment except lift her up, so that the air could reach her better. She said in a comforting tone: "Don't worry, my sister is here with me, and we will see to things for you; only, if you can tell me what wants doing first it will be so much easier, and we shall make fewer mistakes."

"There is a cow with a young calf in the barn, and two lots of pigs are in the sheds beyond, and the poultry; that is all," said the woman. Seeing that Gertrude still lingered, she went on in an imploring tone: "Don't trouble about me; see to the animals first. I shall not feel so bad now that things are being looked after."

"I can send Delia to the barn, but I am sure that you ought to have attention," objected Gertrude.

The woman made an impatient movement of dissent. "Do both of you look after the animals, please. I can't bear to think of dumb beasts suffering. I can wait."

Fearing to worry her by withstanding her any further, Gertrude hurried out to where Delia and the wagon waited, and, putting her in possession of the state of affairs, she went off to the barn, while Delia made the horse fast to a

fence, and, covering it with a rug, came across to lend a hand also.

They fed the cow, but there was no need to milk her; the calf had done that already. There was no need to hunt for the pigs either, because they were squealing so loudly that they could not well be overlooked.

Having made sure that all the hungry things were in process of being looked after, Gertrude left Delia to finish work in the barn, while she herself went back to the house, and, lighting a fire in the stove, set about getting the woman a cup of tea and something to eat.

Meanwhile she was busily debating what she ought to do. The sick woman had said that her husband was away, and it was quite plain that the poor thing could not be left alone; so it would mean that either she or Delia would have to stay and turn sick nurse for the time.

Delia was too young and nervous for work of that sort, and so it was quite necessary for her to stay herself.

But what a nuisance it was! It was not that she minded helping this neighbour who was in trouble; what bothered her was that she would not be able to do the round of the district in order to canvass the farmers on the question of starting the factory at once. She had made arrangements for selling the butter, and now she would look foolish indeed if there were no butter to sell. Moreover, it might damage her chance of future marketing if she did not keep faith with the buyers now.

All the same, the next step was plain before her, and she had to let the future take care of itself while she looked after the poor woman who was in such a sorry case.

Delia made short work of the outside chores, and then came running into the house to know what more was required of them there, and what was to be done about the round that they had laid out for themselves that day.

"I must stay and look after this woman until her husband comes back," said Gertrude, with trouble on her face. "There is not a neighbour on either side who can come to her. The nearest person is that poor little Mrs. Anderson, who has five little children, and of course it is quite out of the question that she could come. I am afraid that you will have to go home, dear, and the round must wait until another day."

"Why can't I go on to the places that we had arranged to visit?" asked Delia, with an impatient wag of the heavy plait of hair hanging down her back. "I am not so old as you, and I do not look so business-like, but I can surely say that I have called for the manager, who is taking on a little sick-nursing as a diversion from butter-thumping. They will all be so impressed with your all-round capability that they will immediately promise so many gallons of cream per week, and there we shall be!"

Gertrude nodded. Of course, from the point of view of stating the case, Delia could do as well or better than she could herself, and it was of all things necessary that the people in the district should understand what was to the fore with regard to the factory venture.

"I don't like you to have that great frisky horse to manage alone. If it were a quieter beast, or if it were our own, and you were more used to it, I should not be so nervous. As it is I shall have cold chills down my back every ten minutes from thinking of you being stuck on the corduroy, or upset into a ditch."

Delia gave a little snort of disgust. "What nonsense! I think there is nothing sillier than indulging in tremors of that sort. I am no more likely to be thrown out when I am alone than when you are there. If I did get a spill, no amount of shaking and shivering on your part could make it any better, so why give way to your feelings?"

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"Why, indeed!" and Gertrude had to laugh because of the disgusted expression of her sister's face.

"I will go to Jeal's, Brown's, Pomfret's, Bowl's, and Smith's; then I will take the horse and wagon back to Mrs. M'Whortle, and ask for the loan of it to-morrow to drive over to fetch you; so don't go wasting your valuable strength in attempting to walk home." Delia spoke with such a grandmotherly air that Gertrude had to laugh, despite her cares, which just then seemed so very heavy.

"Very well; off you go, and do your very best, but don't linger very long at any of the places or you will be late in getting back to The Welcome Home, and it would be truly tragic to think of you out in the dark, while Marion's hair would turn grey with worry." As she spoke, Gertrude went across to the wagon and helped Delia to scramble up. Then, unfastening the horse from the fence, she turned the creature in the way it had to go, and stood watching while it trotted away.

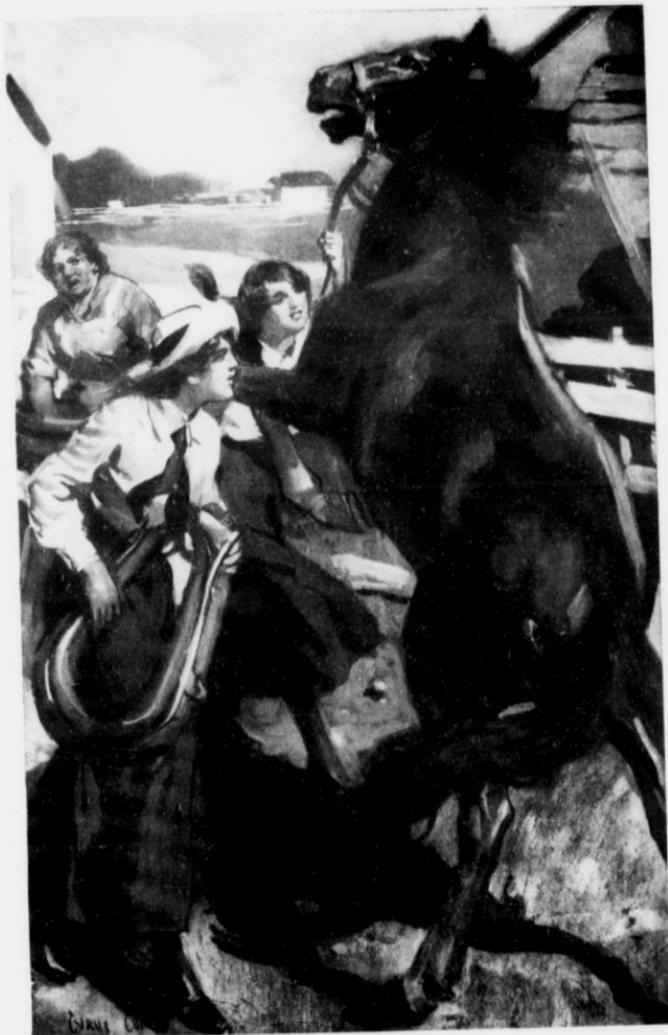
"I suppose that it must be all right, seeing that there was no other way!" she exclaimed, with a sigh, as she turned back into the house again.

"Help, help, help!" the wailing cry sounded from the bedroom, and Gertrude hurried thither, wondering what new terror had developed for the poor sufferer in there.

"Are you worse?" she asked, then ran forward to stop the woman from scrambling out of bed as she was trying to do.

"Oh, I thought that you had driven away in that wagon, and that I was left alone again, and I just could not bear it!" The woman sank back with a moan of relief, and the tears of weakness and suffering ran down her cheeks as Gertrude helped her back to bed and straightened the pillow under her head.

"I am not going away just yet, I will stay with you until your husband comes home if I can. But I may not



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"GERTRUDE WAS NOT SCARED AT THE SPIRITED ANIMAL WHICH SHE AND DELIA HARNESSSED"



be indoors all the time, because there is a lot to do in the barn, and so you will have to lie here alone. But I think that you will not mind that if you know that things are going on all right on the place."

"Oh, I don't mind being left while the creatures are being tended! I thought that you had driven away and left me, and that is what frightened me so much. Who are you? And how came it that you chanced round here this morning? I don't seem to have seen you before, and we have so few fresh people in the neighbourhood that it would be strange if we did not know most of them."

"My name is Gertrude Amoyne, and I have come to live with my sisters at The Welcome Home; that is where old Anthony Bream lived, you know."

"Amoyne, Amoyne? Now where have I heard that name before, I wonder?" and the sick woman struggled to a sitting posture, frowning heavily.

The heart of Gertrude gave a painful leap, and she turned sick and faint, which was of course a very silly thing to do.

In all these weeks since she had made her pitiful little confession to Mr. Carson a careful but unavailing search had been made for Douglas Amoyne. No one knew anything about him. No one had seen a young man who even answered to the description which Gertrude had been able to give of the young man who had come so cheerfully to their rescue, and then had ridden away to report the finding of the schooner which had gone aground on the sands.

The tent and its fixings had disappeared, and although that looked mysterious it might be accounted for in a very natural manner, as someone who believed in finding and keeping might easily have walked off with the lot, and then have been ashamed to speak of what he had done.

These people here might even have been the aggressors,

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and so the name would be familiar to the woman, or Douglas Amoyne might have come here during the time he was camping on Clamping Bay. There were a hundred reasons why the woman should have heard the name of Amoyne before, and not one of them need make Gertrude wince and shiver as she was doing now.

Of all things she dreaded meeting her cousin. It seemed to her that she would read her condemnation in his eyes, and that his contempt for her would be something quite too hard to be borne.

"Have you lived in this neighbourhood long?" she asked, as she moved to and fro tidying the disordered room. It was a relief to be doing something which enabled her to avert her face. It seemed to her that her secret shame must be written in large letters on her countenance.

"Only about three weeks," answered the sick woman. "Tom, that is my husband, heard that there was going to be a butter factory started in the neighbourhood, and as there were a goodish few abandoned farms just round about, he thought he could not do better than take one. But the factory don't seem to get a move on. At least we don't hear anything about it, which is most awfully disappointing, for it is of no use producing things if there is no chance of getting them marketed. It is that what kept us from making things pay in the Wilson township, where we have been living for the past five years."

"There is going to be a factory here, and it is going to open next week, or the week after," replied Gertrude with cheerful determination. "I am the manager, or at least I am going to be, and I had started out canvassing for support from the farmers to-day. This was the first place we called at, and, as you were too ill to be left alone, I just stayed here with you, leaving Delia, my sister, to finish the round, or as much as she could do of it without me."

"You, the manager! But I should have thought it would have needed a man to run a show of that kind."

"I don't see why a woman cannot do it, especially as, until the venture pays well enough to make it possible to buy proper machinery, the butter will mostly have to be made by hand."

"Do you know how to make butter?" There was so much unbelief in the woman's tone that Gertrude felt rather piqued. Surely she must look a very incapable person, or else this stranger would have more faith in her power.

"I was brought up on a farm in England. Then I used to help my father when he had a mixed farm in back Ontario. Since then I have been working for a first-class certificate in a Quebec factory, and, as I passed all right, I think that you may be quite easy as to my ability to make butter."

There was so much asperity in Gertrude's tone that the woman became at once apologetic, almost servile. "I am sure I beg your pardon, miss; what I meant was that you looked too grand, and carried your head too high, to know much about such a homely thing as butter-making so I supposed. But I am sure that Tom will be only too glad to send the cream to your factory. He is dreadful keen on dairy farming. But I am a very poor butter-maker, and it always has made him vexed because I could not turn out a marketable article. But butter-makers are born not made, so my mother used to say, and it is pretty plain to me that I was not born one."

"Some people say that this is a bad time of the year to start a factory. What do you think?" Gertrude was still busy darting to and fro in her tidying of the disordered bedroom, which did not look as if a broom or a duster had come near it these many days past.

"It is a very good time, I should say," answered the

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woman, "because you will have a few weeks to get used to things before the rush of work comes down upon you. Where is the factory to be—at The Welcome Home?"

"No, for several reasons, and one of the most important being that it is not central enough. Of course by rights it should be at Poplar Ridge. But there is no place there which seemed suitable, so we have taken the house and barn at Lambert's Ledge. Do you know the place? Mr. Colman used to live there."

"Yes, it was the holding my man wanted to have; but it had been taken, and so we had this instead, and I was not sorry, because the house is so much better, and a good house means so much to a woman who does not have very good health."

"Yes, I am sure that it does. The house at Lambert's Ledge is very poor, but the thing so greatly in its favour is that it will make such a splendid factory. The barn is a good one, too, and there is a separate stable, which is rather uncommon but very convenient."

"Are you going to live there?"

"No, I shall live at The Welcome Home with my sisters. At first the factory will only call for me on certain days of the week, for with only a little butter to make it will be of no use pottering about there every day. Then as business grows I can be there, and if we find that the venture is going to pay very well indeed, we can have a house put up so that someone will live on the premises."

"You'll do," said the woman, sinking back on to her pillows with a satisfied nod. "I wish, though, that I could remember where it was that I had met someone with your name before. Ah, now I have it! It was Douglas Amoyne that was the name of the young man, and he lodged with my married sister in New Westminster. A shady, bad lot he was, too, but such a nice-speaking fellow, and so ready to oblige anyone. My sister

said that he would cheerfully share his last dollar with any beggar who was in need, but he would not pay his debts."

Gertrude shivered. She saw again the young man with the dripping oilskins, and heard his cheery laugh as he helped them out from under the collapsed tents, and made so light of all the troubles. That was her cousin Douglas all over, and it smote her with a real pang that she had not known him on that morning when they parted from him on the ship that was ashore.

It was the fact that she believed him to be dead which had misled her so greatly, she told herself. She tried to recall his features, just to see if he were anything like Douglas Amoyne she used to know so long ago.

Her cousin had been a boy then, and boys had a trick of altering so greatly when they grew up that it was not wonderful she saw no family likeness. She told herself that she had not a good memory for faces, nor yet for voices. She had not known her Uncle Joseph when they were adrift together on the wreckage.

"How funny that I should encounter father and son in such similar conditions, both having to do with a disaster on the water!" she murmured to herself, when she was out in the barn attending to the animals. She was wondering if she ought to write and tell Mr. Carson of this new clue upon which she had stumbled to the whereabouts of Douglas. It was really hardly worth calling a clue, for Mrs. Paterson, the sick woman in the house yonder, had said that Douglas had left the house of her sister because he could not pay for his lodgings, and now that sister and her husband had gone to live in San Francisco.

"At least I can tell him that I have heard so much," she murmured, and turned to rub the nose of the week-old calf which was confidingly thrust into her hand.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Doings of Delia

DELIA whipped up the horse when she was clear of the Paterson homestead, and gave that spirited animal to understand that she was in a hurry to get through with her day's business. The horse, being colonial, was quite used to having to hustle. So it took the trail at a pace which made Delia hope that no one would be on the watch to summon her for furious driving.

It was a very good thing that she was not nervous, or it is probable that she would have lost her head, and then there would have been a spill, for the horse was not in a mood to put up with overmuch coercing.

The next stopping place was at Joe Anderson's. This was a weather-beaten house dropped down in the middle of a wide pasture, with never a tree, nor anything taller than a gooseberry bush, for ornament or shade. But Delia noticed that the barns were bigger than was usual in the neighbourhood, and the pasture looked in better condition. So perhaps he was a good farmer, even though he had no regard for the beautiful.

Two little boys were at play near the gate, and as they ran to open it for her she did not have to dismount, greatly to her satisfaction; for she was very much afraid that her horse might take it in his head to go on and leave her behind.

"Is your father at home?" she called as she drove in through the gateway, narrowly missing the post,

"No, but Mother is. What do you want?" demanded the youngster, who was neither shy nor scared, although that tiresome horse was trying to do a dance uncomfortably close beside him when Delia reined the creature up.

"I have come about the butter factory," Delia called back over her shoulder. She was going at a great rate across the lumpy pasture, the wagon bumping up and down in a way which threatened serious injury to her spine.

"It is truly awful, but the creature gets along, and that is the principal thing to-day!" she muttered to herself with Spartan resignation as an extra fierce jerk nearly toppled her from the wagon seat.

Mrs. Anderson came to the door with a baby in her arms, and two toddling mites clinging to her skirts. She was pleasant and friendly, but a little doubtful whether her husband would patronize the factory, at least at its first starting.

"He will be keen enough on sending the cream to you if he finds that you can market the butter well," she said with great frankness. "Joe is out to make money, and he will be safe to believe in the factory if the returns pan out right; but I'm afraid that you must not look to him to take any risks in the matter, nor yet to patronize the affair until he is quite sure it is going to be a success. You look dreadful young to have work of that sort on your shoulders. Why, you are nothing but a girl!"

"Oh, I am not the manager; that is my sister! She is years older than I am, and understands the business from bottom to top. Then she is so good at figures, and I am sure she will prove a master at finance." Delia spoke loftily, very much impressed at her way of putting things. It was just as well that Gertrude had been obliged to stay with the sick Mrs. Paterson, since she would certainly not

have been able to sound her own trumpet as effectually as Delia was doing it for her.

"Why didn't your sister come round to see us then, or is she too busy calling on the swell folks?" demanded Mrs. Anderson with so much jealousy showing in her tone that Delia suddenly realized there were class distinctions even here among this sparse and scattered population of hard-working farmers. She rose to the occasion with commendable promptness.

"Gertrude and I were coming out together, and we borrowed Mrs. M'Whortle's horse and wagon because we have not one of our own yet. But when we got to the house where the Patersons live we found Mrs. Paterson ill in bed and her husband away. There was no one to do a thing, and the animals had not been fed, nor had the sick woman been looked after; so Gertrude said that she must stay to look after Mrs. Paterson, and to see that the farm did not suffer, and that I had better go round to see the people about the factory."

"Oh, is your sister one of that sort?" asked Mrs. Anderson in surprise. "I thought that she was quite a society miss. It was your lot that was camping down on Clamping Bay last summer, wasn't it? Folks said then that you were ever so rich—rolling in money, in fact."

"Oh yes, we were camping at Clamping Bay, and we thought that we were fairly well off. But we have lost our money since then—I mean we have found that we have no right to it—and so we have to earn our own living again. That is why we are so keen on making the butter factory pay, don't you see."

Delia's tone was gently persuasive now, for she was very eager to do her very best at this canvassing business, and it was easy to see just where Mrs. Anderson's weak point lay.

"I wonder at your sister staying to help Mrs. Paterson. She is no class, and they do say that the Patersons don't use a table-cloth even on Sundays." Here Mrs. Anderson flung up her head with an air of lofty superiority, and Delia nearly choked in order to keep from laughing outright, for her sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of the room into which the door of the house opened, and if the dirty, ragged thing spread on the table was a table-cloth, she thought that she would prefer to eat her food from a clean-scrubbed table rather than from a board covered with dirty draping such as that.

"Gertrude stayed because there was such desperate need of her; and do you think table-cloths really matter? We did not use one when we were camping, because of the bother of washing. We had to wash our own, you know, and that made us most dreadfully economical. Jessica and I used to scrub our dinner-table with sand, and that kept it beautifully clean."

"I dare say, but I like a table-cloth myself. I was well brought up, you see, and that makes such a difference."

"It does indeed," murmured Delia, hoping that she would not disgrace herself nor lose a customer for the factory by laughing in this silly woman's face.

"I'll tell my husband about the factory, and hear what he has got to say. Perhaps he will be willing to try it, if you can make decent prices, and I am sure that I shall be glad, for you may be sure that with five children to do for, and keep clean, I have not much time for dairy work." With so much Delia had to be content.

But she laughed—oh, how she laughed!—as she drove along the trail which led from the Andersons' place to the farm where the Jeals lived. Mrs. Anderson was surely the silliest person that she had ever seen, and the little airs of superiority were enough to raise a laugh from the most confirmed victim of depression—or at least so she thought.

She was still laughing when she encountered Mr. Jeal and two of his sons. They were mending a bad place in the track near their house, for in that neighbourhood of bad trails it behoved everyone to keep his own bit of highway for himself, and it was better to waste a little time in road-mending than to have a bad breakdown with perhaps a loaded wagon.

"Are you Mr. Jeal?" she called out, thinking that it was a happy chance to meet him there, as it would save her going on nearly another mile to his house.

"That is my name. What do you want?" demanded the farmer. The boys' hands went to their hats, for Delia was the sort of person to call for respectful treatment even from the class known as hobbledehoys.

"I am round for my sister—she is the manager of the butter factory," said Delia. Leaning forward she started to describe the new venture in glowing terms.

The man stopped her with a good-natured laugh, and, holding up his hand as if to stave off another burst of eloquence, he said: "You go home and tell your sister that I will send what cream I've got next week, and then I'll come over to see her make the butter. If she can turn out a good article, and can sell it when it is made, then we'll support her, not unless."

"Much obliged," said Delia, and pulling out her pocket book she entered the name and the amount of cream he would be likely to have, and then with a smiling good morning she drove away, radiantly happy because she had got at least one client promised for next week.

"I will take the cream over to the factory for you, Father, if you like," said the eldest boy, who had taken his cap right off his head and stood bareheaded when Delia drove away, although she had not troubled to turn her head in his direction.

"I'm much obliged, but I will take it myself, thank

you," returned his father dourly. "That girl has got a tongue that is glib enough for anything, but I want to see if they can perform what they promise. It is an amazing thing that the Almighty should have seen fit to endow women with such a power of language. Why, she spit the words out as if she was just full of speech and could not hold it in a minute longer."

Armed with the encouragement which she had obtained from the promise of Mr. Jeal, Delia drove on her round with more spirit than ever, and by the time she had come to the end of her list she had secured four definite promises, and she could expect sufficient cream to make about forty pounds of butter, which, considering the time of the year, was very good indeed.

But by the time she was ready to turn homeward she was fully eight miles from The Welcome Home, and a fine rain was beginning to fall, with a wind so cold that it seemed to go right through her bones as she sat huddled on the wagon seat.

It was hard work to keep warm now, and the horse, having lost its fine flow of spirits, jogged along in a slow trot which was very aggravating, seeing how badly she wanted to get home. There was an empty sack lying in the bottom of the wagon, and, thinking that anything was better than getting wet, Delia reached for it and draped it round her shoulders. She was soon warmer then, and the sack was also useful in keeping the rain out. It smelled abominably fusty, but that was a minor detail; the great comfort was that she was not getting wet, or at least not so wet as she would have done without it.

It was nearly dark when she reached Mrs. M'Whortle's, and that good woman wanted her to come in and have some supper. Being furiously hungry this is just what Delia would have liked to do; but the thought of Marion

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and Jessica alone, and also the prospect of walking home in the dark, made her decide that it would be wise to get to the end of her journey before she satisfied her appetite.

"Had any luck?" asked Mrs. M'Whortle, following her to the gate after the horse had been unhitched and the eldest boy was giving it food.

"Yes, heaps of it!" cried Delia. "That factory is going to hustle, Mrs. M'Whortle, and as soon as we can afford it we will have the most up-to-date machinery that can be bought, and the Clamping Bay Butter Factory will be known right through the Dominion. You see if I am not right."

"I am quite sure that you are going to do your part to make it a success," said the other heartily. "Well, good night! I hope you will get home nicely; it was downright good of your sister to stay with Mrs. Paterson. It is terrible to be left alone when one is sick."

"It is rather dismal to be alone when one is well, on a night like this," muttered Delia to herself as she trudged along the lonely trail. "Oh dear, oh dear, I do believe that I am afraid, and I am quite sure that I should scream in a fearful manner if anything bounced out of the brushwood to scare me just now!"

Fortunately nothing did bounce out to scare her, and in due course she reached the orchard fence and saw the dark outline of the house; but to her dismay there was no light in the window.

"Now, what is wrong, I wonder?" she exclaimed, and there was a real sinking of her heart as she squashed through the puddles of the muddy road up to the house.

There was a roar from Bruno, that sagacious dog having heard a step approaching. But the barking changed to whines and cries of delight when the creature realized who was coming.

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He had lived with the M'Whortles while the girls were away east, but he had been handed over at once when they came to settle at The Welcome Home. Indeed it would have been of little use for anyone to want to keep him when the four girls were within reach.

"Down, Bruno, old fellow; don't eat me!" cried Delia; and then she called out anxiously: "Marion, what is the matter that you have no light?"

"We have only about a tablespoonful of kerosene left, and we are saving it to eat supper by---I mean, we are not using the lantern until supper is ready," called out Marion in a cheerful tone from somewhere back in the gloom. Delia's spirits went up again with a bounce at finding that there was nothing wrong, and that there was no likelihood of supper being unduly delayed.

"Where is Gertrude?" asked Jessica, coming forward to meet Delia, while Marion thrust a handful of dry sticks into the stove, and the leaping flames at once lit up the room.

"Gertrude is doing the angel of mercy to a poor woman who is ill, and she will not be home until to-morrow, Marion. We have got such a lot of cream promised, so the factory will certainly be a success."

"Do you mean that we have got to stay here to-night without Gertrude?" cried Jessica in a tone of horror, breaking in upon Delia's brisk account of the day's doings.

"My dear child, yes; but what does that matter? There are two of us and Bruno to take care of you, and I promise you that we will do our very best." Delia's tone was a little impatient, for Jessica's moods were things to be dreaded, and if she chose to resent the absence of the eldest sister it would be the others who would have to suffer.

"It will be quite all right, dear," put in Marion in a soothing tone. "Of course Gertrude could not refuse to

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stay with the poor sick woman, and we shall do quite well without her."

But Jessica was not to be easily consoled, and burst into such loud lamentations, crying and sobbing with so much vigour that Delia, finding it intolerable, burst into reproaches.

"You are so dreadfully selfish that it is really a trial to live with you!" she said severely. "Here am I, wet, tired, and hungry, and yet I cannot get off my damp things, or have supper in peace, just because you are silly enough to resent things which no one can help. Do, for pity's sake, buck up, child, and be reasonable! Or, if you can't be that, go to bed, and leave us in peace."

"Don't be hard on her, Delia," said Marion softly; while Jessica sat erect, and stared at Delia in amazement that anyone should speak to her in such a tone.

"I am not hard on her, but I do hate to see her so selfish. Why should the whole world be regulated more for her comfort than for that of the rest of us?" demanded Delia stormily. "I am tired, and cold, and hungry, and I can't have any peace just because she chooses to behave like a great baby—oh, I am sick of it!"

"You shall have your supper at once. Come along; we have roast potatoes and butter, with coffee to follow," said Marion, eager to make a diversion. She was positively afraid of Jessica in some of her moods, and if Delia were going to talk to her in this fashion, there was no saying what might be the result of it all.

Strangely enough, Jessica sat up, and even looked a little ashamed of herself. She was very quiet; but when it came to eating roast potatoes with little wedges of butter cunningly inserted under the brown skin, while the fragrance of hot coffee pervaded the room, well, it was not easy to pose as a martyr, especially if one felt very, very hungry.

Then it was quite impossible not to laugh over the

doings of Delia, and the solitary house re-echoed with their merriment when Delia described the class distinctions of Mrs. Anderson, and her contempt of people who had no table-cloth.

Bruno barked loudly every time the girls laughed. He seemed to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the fun, even though he could not understand what they were talking about.

But the kerosene in the lantern was almost exhausted, and they had to hurry to finish supper, for it would never do to be left without one little drop of oil in the house for use if an emergency arose in the night.

Marion had succeeded in getting one bedroom habitable in the previous day, and they all three slept in there on this night, which saved a great deal of trouble, as they had no bedding to put straight after supper.

They all dropped a little quiet when it came to getting ready for bed, and each of them thought of the time when Gertrude was in hospital.

They had Mme Delarey to fly to then, but now they had no one, and the three drew a little closer together, lacking the protective presence of the capable elder sister.

Outside, the night was filled with the ceaseless drip, drip of the falling rain, but, thanks to the tent canvas, not a drop of wet came through the broken roof of the house, and the dreams of the three were undisturbed until morning.

The next day woke them to great activity, for Victor Green came over from Poplar Ridge with a cow and calf which Mr. M'Whortle had bought on Gertrude's behalf two days before. He helped Marion fix up a partition in the barn, so that the live-stock could be kept to one end of the building, while stores of various kinds and a great pile of hay occupied the other end. He had a great hamper of fowls in the back of the wagon, the calf having ridden

in the front part, while its mother walked behind. When this live-stock had all been accommodated in the barn the place did not look like the same.

"You ought to have started in the spring. You will have to buy food all winter for yourselves and the creatures, and it will take a mighty lot of paying for." Victor Green wagged his head in a melancholy fashion over this lack of wisdom on the part of the four girls who were setting up on their own account.

Marion laughed at him. "But we had to live somewhere, you know, and, having bought the place, of course we have no rent to pay, so the food bills for the animals and the poultry will not cost more than our rent if we had gone on living in the city. Then there is the butter factory, you know, that has got to be put into working order before the spring comes, and I expect that it will take a few months for the idea to catch on with the people who have cream to send."

"I don't know about that. The factory is going to pay, of course, because one person who understands making butter must turn out a better article than twenty women who don't know how to do it, and don't want to learn."

"Very well; if the factory pays, the farm is certain to succeed," Marion answered brightly. She told Victor to come into the house and have something to eat before he went back to Poplar Ridge.

"Old W. W. says that the next place to this has been taken," announced Victor, as he munched a hard biscuit and sipped a mug of coffee.

"That is good news," said Marion. "If the people are pleasant, why, we shall have neighbours within a mile. The place is getting quite crowded."

Delia asked who the new neighbours were.

"I don't know," answered Victor. "That is, I don't

know their name; but W. W. said that they came from over the border, and that they were driving here in their own wagons—about four hundred miles, I think he said—and they have got an enormous lot of children.”

“It sounds hopeful. Let us hope that they have got an enormous number of cows also, and then there will be hope for our factory. If you are going back by way of Colman's place I might as well ride with you; for, as Gertrude is not at home, I must go over there alone, and start getting things into order; and I want to put a notice up on the gate to tell people when we shall be there to receive cream.” Delia struggled into her coat as she spoke, and was exceedingly thankful for the chance of a ride, even though she would probably have to walk back.

“How will Gertrude get home?” asked Marion, who was thinking that she would have to be very active indeed to get through all there was to be done that day, unless, indeed, she could persuade Jessica to take to hard work as a diversion from repining over the riches that had taken to themselves wings.

“She told me that if I did not come for her she would walk across to the factory as soon as Mrs. Paterson's husband came home, so I expect that I shall find her there,” Delia answered. She went off with Victor in the wagon, and the other two were left to get through the day as best they could.

Many were the visits that Marion contrived to pay to the barn that day, for it was to her the most delightful thing imaginable that she should have live-stock there to be looked after. The cow appeared to be a friendly animal—at least it did not resent matters when Marion stooped over the red-and-white calf, that had already received the name of Billy. The fowls were easily won to friendly relations of course. A few grains of corn will always open the way to the affections of feathered folk, and

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although for to-day they had to be shut in the barn, there would be no trouble with them afterwards.

But each time that Marion went back to the house after one of these visits to her new possessions she found Jessica sitting in an attitude of the deepest melancholy, and looking as if life was not worth living.

Of course Marion felt sorry for her. That is to say, she was willing to make allowances for the bodily weakness which made such a frame of mind possible. But it was of no use to encourage that sort of thing, and, judging that work was the best remedy, she prepared to find her sister so much occupation that there should be no time for brooding.

It was one thing to make work for Jessica, but quite another to get her to do it, however.

Marion was intent on getting the second bedroom into habitable order to-day; but as that was hard work she proposed to do that herself, while Jessica made bread in the kitchen. There was nothing in the house but hard-tack biscuit, and nice new bread would be a delightful change for supper.

"If you want bread made to-day I think that you will have to do it yourself; I do not feel equal to it," said Jessica languidly. She sat with her head leaning on her hand, looking such a picture of misery that Marion felt a sudden desire to shake her.

"I suppose that I shall have to make it myself, if you won't do it for me, and the bedrooms will have to stay as they are if I cannot get time to do them. But it is rather hard that there should not be a comfortable place for Gertrude to sleep to-night, after all the watching and bother that she must have had last night."

"It is so bad that I should have to do things when I feel so unfit," sighed Jessica, and at the sound of complaint in her voice Marion had a sudden fit of softening.

"Very well, dear, if you don't feel fit for anything, just take a stick and go for a little walk in the sunshine. Bruno will take care of you, and I can manage somehow."

"I don't feel up to walking either, and there is nothing to see if I do go out," sighed Jessica.

"Would you like to go to bed then?" Marion asked; but now she had some difficulty in keeping the asperity out of her voice.

"I don't want to do anything," replied Jessica. She yawned, stretching her arms above her head and sticking her feet out in front of her.

"Then you ought to want to do something!" burst out Marion in an explosive fashion. Her temper was always quick, and to her it seemed a disgraceful thing that one of them should be content to sit idle while the others worked so hard and endured so cheerfully. "Why should you be content to idle through the hours while all the rest of us are toiling to make a home?"

"I am not strong, and I don't feel fit for exertion," replied Jessica calmly. "Besides, I don't want to do anything."

Marion made a noise between a snort and a groan, as she stirred the raising stuff into the flour with so much energy that she was partly veiled in white dust; then she burst out in an angry tone: "If we none of us did anything that we did not want to do, I am thinking there would not be much done. Do you suppose that Gertrude wanted to stay at that lonely place with the sick woman last night?"

"She need not have stayed if she had not wanted to," replied Jessica sullenly, "and I am sure that we needed her at home. It was horrid without her, and she ought to have come back." The others did not pet her as much as Gertrude, and so she had a grievance, and a very pronounced one.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

"You really are disgustingly selfish," exclaimed Marion, "and I shall tell Gertrude that she is spoiling you most fearfully. At this rate it will soon be something of a hardship to live with you."

"Of course Gertrude makes a fuss over me, for she knows that it is her fault that I was so ill." Jessica tilted her chair to a more comfortable angle as she spoke, and settled a cushion in an easier fashion at her back.

"Whatever do you mean?" demanded Marion, staring at her in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You can't deny it," snapped Jessica. Discarding her cushion, she sat upright, facing round on Marion and pouring out her grievances in a rapid stream. "I heard Gertrude and you talking one night, and Gertrude said that if she had not done wrong in hiding her knowledge of Douglas being alive I should not have been ill, and that my suffering was her punishment."

"I think that if you were to ask the doctor he would tell you that the cause of your illness was gastric trouble, and not anything that Gertrude did or did not do," replied Marion. Now she was so angry that her voice suddenly dropped to a low, vibrating key, and her face was very white. "I know that Gertrude blamed herself, and said it was her fault, because she had not at once published the thing which she discovered. But you must remember that she hid it more for our sakes than for her own. And you must also remember that the only one of us who has ever reproached her with making it known when she did was yourself."

Jessica nodded. "I know. I hate to be poor, and it was silly of Gertrude to tell. It was of no use either, for you see they can't find Douglas even now, and there is the money lying and doing no good. If we had kept it we should have been in London by this time and enjoying ourselves immensely—pantomimes, concerts, excursions,

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everything that we could wish; instead of which we are stuck here on this dismal little farm, where it rains all day, and Gertrude spends her nights looking after sick women who do not belong to her, instead of doing her duty in caring for me."

Marion fought hard with a desire to shake Jessica in order to get the selfishness out of her. Then, seeing how thin and shadowy the poor girl looked, she decided that it would not do at all, and burst into a ringing shout of laughter by way of relieving her feelings.

"I don't see what there is to laugh about," grumbled Jessica, who liked to be taken seriously, and would have preferred to see Marion in a towering rage.

"I had either to laugh or shake you, and laughing seemed easier," answered Marion, who was panting for breath.

"It would not do to shake me. I should drop to pieces, I think, I feel so very loose." Jessica shrugged her shoulders as she spoke and sighed dismally. Things were horrid everywhere. She hated being poor, and she hated the limitations of *The Welcome Home*. The funny part was, that she had never minded roughing it in camp, and indeed had cheerfully borne more discomfort under canvas than she had had to suffer since coming to live in this lone farm-house.

A crease of care showed on Marion's cheerful face. How was she to deal with this poor, disagreeable child, whose selfishness was largely the outcome of her physical weakness?

An inspiration came to her, and as she thoughtfully stirred the flour, and put the pan on the side of the stove to keep warm, she began to tell Jessica of the dreadful trouble the three of them were in during those days in Quebec, when neither doctor nor nurse thought that she, Jessica, could possibly get better.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

"You seemed to be slipping out of life, and because we loved you so dearly it did not seem to any of us that we could ever be happy again. I was sitting in a chair close to the window, and hoping that if you did die I might soon die too, when Gertrude came out of the bedroom and walked up to me with a look on her face such as I had never seen there before. I cried out in dismay, for I thought that you were already gone, especially as Delia was with her. Then Gertrude said that you were going to get better, because she was going to tell what she knew. I thought when she had done that she was the very bravest girl that I had ever seen or heard of, for fancy what it must have meant to her, Jessica."

Jessica nodded. She was keenly interested in this story of emotion and suffering in which she had been the central figure. Her self-love was gratified, and altogether it made her feel that she was really a person of importance that all the others should revolve around her as if she were the sun, and they merely minor constellations.

But Marion was warming to her subject, and went on talking as she moved about the kitchen clearing things out of the way and setting the place in order.

"There is not one of us who had to feel the pinch of poverty more than Gertrude did in the old days, and there was not one of us who could better appreciate the advantages that Uncle Joseph's money could bring. It was like the irony of fate that she should have been the one to discover that Douglas was alive, and the shock must have nearly killed her. Do you not remember that she fainted that day on the sands? Well, that was one result of what she had been enduring, and yet it was not for her own sake that she was going to hide her knowledge, but just because we might go on having a good time. There would have been no more peace of mind for her—nothing but black, gnawing remorse because of the wrong that she

was doing. Oh, Gertrude is grand, the sort of girl to be admired and imitated, and when I hear you whining about your suffering, and what you have to endure, do you wonder that I want to shake you?"

"No; honestly I don't!" admitted Jessica, with such a burst of candour that Marion was fain to believe that her lecture had done good, although she was wise enough to say nothing about it, and merely remarked that while the bread was rising she would go on with the bedroom clearing.

"I will knead the bread when it is ready," said Jessica. She rose up, to hunt for a pinafore, with such a new air of decision that Marion could have danced with delight at the change.

Work went merrily after that, and when evening came, bringing Gertrude home from Paterson's place and Delia from the factory, there was a tidy house to cheer them, with a well-spread supper table, and a very-much-improved Jessica.

Marion kept her own counsel as to the methods by which she had roused the youngest sister from the selfish absorption into which she had sunk, for her sense of sisterly loyalty would not let her talk on such a subject.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Business Women

THE winter dragged on with its usual train of dreary days, of wild storms, and weeks of frost and snow. Then the daylight grew stronger, the sun had more warmth in it, and in the sheltered nooks along the shore the flowers began to show, and the leaf buds on the forest trees were swelling, and swelling, and showing delicate fringes of green and pink and gold. It was springtime, and everything was fresh and vigorous.

Mighty changes had been taking place at The Welcome Home, and inside and out it looked like a different house.

The roof shingles had all been neatly repaired, and the menfolks of the district were still chuckling about the very good feed the four Miss Amoynes had given them on the day of the shingle bee. There had been other bees since then, but these had mostly been confined to the four sisters. The house had been painted inside and out, appearing now as it must have done in its first youth, as a white house with green shutters.

A garden had been made immediately in front of the windows, pushing the orchard back a little, while on the side where the barn stood a number of hen-coops with wire-netting guards showed that the poultry was increasing on Marion's hands. This part of the venture was peculiarly hers, for the other girls were away so much that, although they were of the greatest help in tilling the fields and working the garden, they could be of little real

assistance in managing the poultry, as that needed constant care.

At the factory Gertrude and Delia were turning out a hundred pounds of butter every week, although it was not yet the middle of April, and they were getting a good price for their product, which was very soothing to the shareholders.

It was Jessica who was most changed and improved by the discipline of the winter's work. She had grown a great deal, and still had a shadowy look which made her sisters secretly anxious on her account. But she had lost the languor and the discontent which had made her so much of a trial to live with in the autumn and early winter.

All through the winter she had worked at home, seconding Marion's endeavours as best she could. It was the cooking which mostly fell to her share, and it was to her credit that she did it without complaining, for she secretly hated pottering about over a stove, and would far rather have been wrapped up in an old coat and working out-of-doors as Marion was. But she had the sense to see that they could not both be out, and Marion, being stronger, could get through more work.

With the coming of spring things had altered a little. The nearest neighbours, who had driven three hundred miles in their own wagons in the autumn to take up land in the district, and who had a swarm of children—mostly tiny ones—had had more than their share of trouble in the winter. There had been sickness among the children, and many were the nights when one or the other of the four girls had gone over to do the watching, so that the tired mother might sleep. With the early days of January two more babies—a lusty pair of twin boys—had arrived on the scene, and then Mrs. Lorimer, the harassed mother of the big little family, had offered Jessica a regular wage if

she would go every day and look after the babies for her. There were three infants in the family who could not walk, a weakly child of two years old, and another of three.

It was in Jessica's mind to refuse flatly, for although she had no objection to babies taken in moderation, three at once were rather a big lot to undertake. But she knew that the money at home was running rather low, and that they would be poor until Marion could begin to realize on some of the produce of the farm. Gertrude and Delia, although working tremendously hard, were not as yet making enough to keep them, and it was necessary to make every dollar go as far as two. So Jessica did valiant battle with herself, and told Mrs. Lorimer that she would do her best for the babies for the two dollars a week which that good woman offered.

So the lengthening days of spring found her trundling a truck of home manufacture about the meadows in the sunshine. But, as the truck was heavy, and no more than three babies could be stowed in it at once, Tom Lorimer invested in an aged pony. The truck was exchanged for a wide cart, something after the pattern of a milk float, and, with five or six young Lorimers packed into it, Jessica drove about the fields, and even down to the shore, getting all the benefit of the fresh air and the sunshine, and not being overdone with work either.

The easiest way to carry the infant twins had been to put their cradle into the nursery cart. The bigger children could not roll upon them, and there was not so much fear of anything happening to them, while they did not get so badly shaken when that ancient cart went bumpety bump over the inequalities of the road.

It was the shore that Jessica mostly made for in these bright days of early spring. Guiding the old pony carefully down on to the sands by a sort of little causeway which she had made with her own hands, she would wander for

miles and miles across the firm stretches of sand when the tide was a long way out. The pony was quite shrewd enough to approve of this sort of travel, for the cunning old creature had long since discovered that there were no bumpy places on the sands, and, although occasionally there was a rather heavy drag on the wheels, on the whole it was the easiest going to be found anywhere about that neighbourhood of ill-made roads. So the fine-day pilgrimages would extend for miles, with Jessica either walking by the side of the cart or sitting curled up in an uncomfortable bunch at the back, just beyond the cradle containing the twins.

She walked over to the Lorimers' farm one fine morning at the end of April to find that the other horse, which usually took the cream to the factory, had suddenly fallen lame and was unworkable. Mrs. Lorimer was in despair, for her husband had started at dawn with the team of young horses to help a neighbour four miles away with seeding, and so there was no horse to take the cream to the factory.

"Would you run back home, Jessica, and ask your sister if she would kindly call for the cream as she goes to the factory?" said Mrs. Lorimer, darting out to meet Jessica as she came across the meadow.

"Gertrude and Delia started half an hour before I did this morning," answered Jessica. "They had a breakdown of one of the churns last night, and so they have got to do double work with the other." She added brightly: "Let me take the cream over with the children's pony?"

"Oh, I should be glad if you would! for it must go to-day, and it is of no use to send Bill with the pony, for the creature won't stir for him, and the more he thrashes the beast the more obstinately it refuses to budge."

"I know," laughed Jessica. "But that is Bill's own fault, for I, who never use a stick to it, have no trouble to

get it along. But what will you do with the babies while I am gone?"

"Oh, we can manage!" replied the mother, with a nod of thanks to Jessica. "The babies can sleep indoors for once. They have quite their share of fresh air these fine days, and I will tell Bill to pack all the others into the truck and drive them down to the pastures when he takes the calves down. It will be rather arm-aching work, but it is his own fault; he ought to be able to make a pony go as well as you do, and then he could have taken the cream to the factory."

"I don't suppose it will be pulling the truck along which will upset him so much as the fact that he has to turn nurse-maid," said Jessica, with a gurgle of laughter as she thought of how disgusted Bill would look at the prospect in front of him. She hurried away to the barn, and, calling to the pony, hitched it to the nursery cart. This also it was of no use to leave to the tactless Bill, for the pony knew him and would not even be harnessed at his hands.

The drive to the factory would be quite a pleasant diversion, especially as she would have no babies to look after *en route*, and so Jessica was in an uncommonly gay mood this morning. She tickled and played with the pony during the process of hitching up until that ancient animal, entering into the spirit of the fun, fairly danced with glee and rattled the cart along the stone causeway from the barn to the back door of the farm-house at a gallop.

"The little beast won't even walk when I go to put him along," grumbled Bill, the shock-headed hired man, who was carrying two buckets of pigs' food from the little out-house where the cooking was done for the animals.

"Ah, the pony knows when his feelings are considered!" retorted Jessica, with a merry laugh. She checked the pony at the back door, and left him standing there while she went in to help bring out the cream.

This was in covered cans, each well fastened down, and

when these were both firmly fixed in the cart she got in at the back and drove away to the factory.

It was very pleasant to be relieved from the babies for an hour or two, as naturally so many irresponsible little creatures needed very constant attention. The pony, being fresh and in the mood for work, trotted along at a fine pace, and in something over half an hour drew up outside the factory.

Delia came running out, looking very business-like in her cotton frock and big white apron.

"Why, Jess, what is up, and where are the babies?" she demanded, for surely it was passing wonderful to see Jessica out in the pony cart without a tribe of the Lorimer babies to keep her company.

"Bill is trundling the bigger ones about the pastures in the truck," replied Jessica. "It is a sort of punishment for him because this wise animal will have nothing to do with him. He is a cruel youth, and over free with the stick, and I don't blame the pony. The other horse is lame, so I have brought the cream; but you will have to help me carry it in, Delia, even if it is against the rules, for it is fearfully heavy."

"Of course we will bring it in," cried Delia. She called to Gertrude, who came running out to see what was the matter. She also was swathed in a big white pinafore, and looked very alert and capable. She helped Delia carry in the cream, while Jessica looked on. Then it was weighed and tested, a receipt was written for it, and the cans, being emptied, were weighed again, after which Jessica was free to depart.

She lingered a moment, however, for the factory looked a very pleasant place this morning, and it was fun to see her sisters at work.

"How soon will you be ready for another assistant?" she asked partly in fun and partly in serious earnest.

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"Not this summer, I am afraid," replied Gertrude. Then she asked anxiously: "Are the babies too much for you, dear? If they are, there is plenty for you to do at home, you know."

"Oh no! I am not overdone," replied Jessica brightly, although there was a rather wistful look in her eyes. "Only you and Delia looked so very happy, and you are here together, so I thought that I should like to come too; but I dare say I should soon get tired, and then I should want to go driving along the shore with the babies."

"I dare say you would," laughed Gertrude, reassured by Jessica's manner. "But I was going to say to you this morning, only I forgot it, don't go too far out on the sands beyond Spit Head for a few weeks, for Sam Matlock was telling me yesterday that the tides in the springtime are sometimes very treacherous there, and they run in so quickly that you may easily be caught and cut off before you realize that the tide is coming in at all."

"Sam Matlock is an old goose, but I will be very careful," answered Jessica, with a laugh. She packed herself and the cream cans into the cart, and, turning the head of the ancient pony, went her way back to the Lorimer homestead.

"Do you think that the child is happy in taking care of all those children?" Gertrude asked a little anxiously as the old pony rattled away along the road, and Jessica waved a hand in farewell.

"I think that she likes it much better than she would steady hard work," Delia answered. She had slipped on a big black overall now, for the little oil engine, which was the motive power for turning the churns, had chosen to go wrong, and as they had to tend it themselves, why, one of them must see to it now.

Gertrude sighed. Her thoughts had gone back to the money they had had to relinquish, and if there was a swift

spasm of regret at her heart who could blame her? It was not even as if Douglas had come forward to claim his inheritance. He had not been found, and the money was lying idle. It might even come to them again, only on that she never speculated. It was not for herself that she wanted it. She had never been more happy nor more content than now. She had work enough to do to keep her mind and her energy employed. She was sufficiently her own mistress to enjoy the feeling of independence which goes so far to sweeten toil, and she was making a success of the thing which she had undertaken. But if ever Jessica looked pensive or Delia was extra tired, then the old regrets awoke, and she was always thinking how much easier life would have been for them with the money which Uncle Joseph left behind him, to lighten the daily burdens.

Unquestionably she had done right in confessing. It was only the necessity of that confession which bothered her, and it was what Mrs. M'Whortle would call an inscrutable Providence which had caused Gertrude to stumble on that deserted encampment, and to find the little book lying in the tussock of coarse grass.

She had been across that camping place many times since, but everything had disappeared now. The funny part was that no one knew where any of the things had gone, whether the owner had come back for them afterwards, or whether someone else, acting on the principle of finding is keeping, had walked off with them. No one seemed to know.

It was strange how her thoughts clung round the subject that day after Jessica had driven away. Even the fact that she had to don another black overall, and go to the help of Delia with the engine, could not take her mind from that mystery of the shore, and she seemed to live all day with the sound of the sea in her ears.

The weather changed with remarkable suddenness in the

early afternoon, the sky became overcast, and a smart thunder-storm came on, lasting for nearly an hour, while the rain came down in sheets, and a wild wind lashed the naked boughs of the trees, tore some of the shingles from the roof of the factory, and frightened Delia nearly into fits, for she was outside when the shingles came clattering to the ground within a few inches of her head.

They waited until the worst of the storm was over, and then fixed the place up for the night as best they could, so that any more rain which might fall during the darkness might not damage the fixings of the factory or the butter, which was all packed ready for sending away on the following day.

When this was done they harnessed their horse to the little wagon in which they rode to and fro, and set off on the drive home.

The rain was ceasing now, and the wind was dying away in long sobbing sighs that rustled the tree tops and caused the tall tufts of dead grass to stir and shiver as it passed by.

"It is going to be a fine evening after all," said Delia, who drove. Gertrude sat crouched in a heap by her side, apparently thinking very hard about something.

"I believe it is," she answered, rousing from her abstraction with an effort. "But how that storm did rage! It made me think of the time when we were washed out of camp, and Cousin Douglas came to our rescue. Is it not strange that he has never claimed his money?"

"It is strange, too, that he never came to thank us for taking care of his old ship." Delia pouted as she spoke, for the remembrance of the young man's ingratitude always made her feel cross.

Gertrude laughed softly. "I have my own theory about that young man, and why he never came," she said, fixing her eyes on a patch of blue which showed where the clouds were rolling back. "I believe that he found out who we

were, and also that we were enjoying his father's money, and so he would not come near us again, so that we might not find out that we had no right to it."

"In others words, you have made him into a hero, and have put him on a pedestal," cried Delia in a mocking tone.

"Oh dear, no, I am not in the habit of putting people on pedestals!" replied Gertrude lightly. But the crimson flamed all over her neck and brow, rising right up to the roots of her hair, and making her furiously angry; for she hated to blush, and this was such a silly thing to blush about.

"Humph! I guess if he knew that he had any right to the money he would come forward to claim it. Probably he has never seen the advertisements. I don't suppose that he is one of the self-sacrificing kind who are willing always to give up their rights," Delia snorted.

"I don't think that he is a specially good young man—indeed I know that he is not," replied Gertrude. She told Delia what Mrs. Paterson had said about Douglas Amoyne lodging with her sister in New Westminster, and never paying his debts.

"It sounds just like what we have always heard of our cousin, but it does make me sad to think that nice young man who helped us out of our pickle should be that kind of an individual." Delia sighed, and then brought the lash of the whip lightly down across the back of the horse, for the road was fairly good at this part, and she was in a hurry to get home.

"I wonder if Jessica is home yet?" said Gertrude when they had their first glimpse of the white house nestling amid the orchard trees.

"Not likely," replied Delia. "Mrs. Lorimer would surely want some help in putting all those babes to bed," and then she jumped down from the wagon and opened

the gate for the horse to pass into the orchard, which was the nearest way round to the barn.

"I thought that Jessica looked so tired and so wistful this morning," said Gertrude. She sat looking at the sky still, and wondering if they could not do without that two dollars a week which Jessica earned so hardly, so that the child might have an easier life.

Marion was busy cooking supper, but Jessica had not appeared yet, which was not wonderful—indeed sometimes she was not home until quite late; but then Mr. Lorimer or Bill always drove her home in the wagon, for they were really careful of her, and grateful too for the help she gave the mother with her many babies.

"I will finish getting supper if you have anything more to do out-of-doors," said Gertrude, turning up her sleeves, and edging Marion away from the baking board.

"There is the milking, and I have to shut the chickens into the pens, for Victor Green told me people were losing poultry right and left, there are so many foxes in the neighbourhood. He said that he was going to try to shoot some of them, and I told him that if he lived in England he would be really and truly sent to Coventry if he did things of that sort." Marion dusted the flour from her hands as she spoke and yielded her place to her sister. "How goes business to-day?"

"Swimmingly. For the first time since the factory has been started Delia and I shall earn a living wage. Just think of it! I feel in danger of swelled head, for it has been a really hard pull, and it is beautiful to think that at last we are getting matters on a sound financial basis."

Marion nodded in complete sympathy and understanding. There had been a good many anxious days for both her and Gertrude, for they had been living on their capital this winter, and both of them had been gravely concerned to see things begin to pay somewhere. That was why

they had let Jessica go nursing the Lorimer babies, because the two dollars helped so greatly with the weekly bill at the store at Poplar Ridge.

At this moment Delia put her head in at the door to ask Marion if she wanted any help with the milking.

"There is another storm coming up, I think," said Delia, "and if we hurry we may get all the outdoor work done before it begins." She had thrown off her coat and enveloped herself in a big pinafore of the useful sort.

The two went off together then, while Gertrude finished the scones, and put them in the oven to bake. Then she cleared away the baking board, dusted the table down, and began to get supper ready. This was usually her work, as it set Marion free for the outdoor tasks, which were so much heavier now that spring had come, and livestock had increased on their hands.

It was raining heavily by the time the two girls came indoors. Even then there was the milk to be separated, and some other things to be done by way of preparing for the needs of the next morning.

Still Jessica had not come, and so the three sat down to supper without her. It was Gertrude who was grumbling because the hours of work were so long for the child, when Delia called out that they were going to have a visitor, for someone with a big umbrella was coming in at the orchard gate.

"Who can it be?" demanded Marion, with a rueful look at her blouse, which, although clean, was not in her mind spruce enough for that time of the day.

"I can't see, because of his umbrella. Ah! now he has moved it, and I do believe that it is Mr. Lorimer!"

Mr. Lorimer it was, and a moment later he was at the door and asking anxiously if Jessica and the babies were there.

## CHAPTER XIX

### An Anxious Search

GERTRUDE sprang up from her place at the table, and hurried to the door, when she heard Mr. Lorimer asking if Jessica and the babies were there.

"I was just at that moment grumbling because Jessica was so late in coming back from your house, so what do you mean by asking if she is here?" Gertrude's voice was hoarse with sudden apprehension, and Mr. Lorimer looked at her with dismay on his face.

"We have not seen her since the morning, when she took the babies off in the pony cart. When the storm came up, and she hadn't got home, the wife thought that she must have sheltered here, and when we got tired of waiting for her to turn up, Mrs. Lorimer made me take an umbrella and come to fetch them home. I would have come before if I had even guessed that there was anything wrong, and the trouble is that we don't know in which direction she has gone."

"Marion, have you seen Jessica since the morning?" demanded Gertrude, facing round upon her second sister, who stood white and shivering by her side.

"She went past, as if on her way to the shore, about half-past eleven," said Marion promptly. "I was not in the house then, but at the far end of the barn pasture, and I was mending the fence to keep the cows from wandering. I heard Bruno bark, and then I heard wheels. I waved my handkerchief and Jessica waved back. She did not stop,

she rarely does when she has got the children with her, not unless she has any message to bring."

"Ah, it is too dreadful!" groaned Gertrude. Turning, she reached for the coat and hat which she had hung on a peg just inside the door when she came in from the factory.

"What are you afraid of?" cried Marion sharply, for she was frightened by the look on Gertrude's face and the horror in her voice.

Gertrude reeled, but caught herself up sharply, for certainly this was no time to give way.

"I am afraid that she went out too far on the sands, and was caught by the tide beyond Spit Head. Someone was telling me, only the other day, that the tides in spring-time are so dangerous far out on the sands. I spoke of it to her this morning, but I am afraid that I did not impress it on her enough, and you know that she is very heedless of danger."

"Good gracious, Miss Amoyne, if that is so, whatever shall we do?" Mr. Lorimer dropped on to the bench outside the door, and his umbrella rolled away from him unheeded on the path. Never a very strong man, this hint of possible disaster nearly broke him down, and he was telling himself that he would not dare to go home and tell his wife that her babies had come to harm.

"We must go and see if we can find any traces of their having gone down to the shore," said Gertrude, who was busily buttoning her long coat. "Of course Jessica may have skirted the shore and gone home by way of Waltonthorpe or Cat's Point; but that we may be able to find out when we get down to the turn. Are you coming, Marion? But that will leave Delia quite alone, for I want to take Bruno with us."

"I don't mind being alone; indeed, I should hate for Marion to stay when she may be of use to you," interposed

Delia hastily. She had seen Marion reaching for her coat also, and had been thankful, indeed, that it was Marion and not herself who had to go on search, for she quailed at the thought of what the finding might mean.

"I must go; I simply cannot sit at home and wait for news," answered Marion. Her voice had a choked sound, but her eyes were dry, and her manner was quite calm, as she, too, rapidly buttoned her coat and then reached for a hank of clothes line which hung neatly coiled against the wall.

"What is that for?" asked Gertrude sharply.

"I don't know. I saw it hanging, and it came to my mind that it might be useful. Had we not better take a lantern with us; it will be dark soon?"

It was Delia who ran for the lantern, and saw that there was oil in it, and it was she who brought stout walking-sticks for them.

"We are ready," said Gertrude. She picked up Mr. Lorimer's umbrella and gave it to him. It was raining still, but not heavily. Neither she nor Marion had umbrellas, for it looked as if it might clear up soon, and, in their fierce anxiety, getting wet did not seem to matter in the least.

"Come, Bruno," said Marion, as the dog stood looking from her to Delia, as if uncertain whether he had to go or to stay at home.

But when Marion told him to come with her, the creature seemed to realize that there was trouble of an extra-special sort impending, and lifting up his shaggy head he let out a howl so doleful that Mr. Lorimer went white as a piece of paper, and called out sharply.

"Make the brute stop that row, I—I can't bear it."

"Nor I," said Gertrude.

Marion cuffed Bruno's ears, told him in a solemn tone that worse would speedily befall if he were not instantly

quiet, and then the three went off along the trail which wound past the gate of the orchard to the shore. Delia watched them until they were out of sight.

The clouds were breaking over the sea, and a lurid gleam from the crimson sunset shone down upon the water, staining it as with blood.

Gertrude shivered. Never, never had she seen the sunset look like that, and in her dreadful anxiety she took it for an omen, a warning of the terrible disaster which the three of them were fearing had fallen upon them.

"See, Gertrude, the tracks go straight out on to the sands," said Marion. There was a horror in her voice which she could not keep back.

Mr. Lorimer plumped down on a big boulder, turning so deadly sick and faint that for a few moments he could not go on, and Marion was perforce compelled to stay with him until he felt better, since it was not common humanity to leave him alone.

But Gertrude pressed steadily forward, following those wheel tracks which were so plainly to be seen.

A little farther on they veered inshore a little, and to her dismay she saw that they were heading straight for Spit Head, which was a companion head to the bluff, but was so placed on the coast line that anyone out beyond it might be caught and cut off by the tide without realizing that there was danger until all hope of escape was gone.

As long as she could see, Gertrude followed the tracks, which kept always at the edge of the tide. When the light faded out, she lit the lantern which she was carrying and went forward still. She supposed that Marion and Mr. Lorimer were following close behind, but she never looked round, and so she did not know that Mr. Lorimer had fainted dead away, and that Marion was having her hands full in bringing him round unassisted.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

Poor man, he was to be forgiven for his weakness. He had had no food since breakfast, and had been doing a harder day's work than usual; and, in addition to these things, he suffered from a weak heart, although Marion in her fuming impatience accused him merely of having weak nerves.

Swinging the lantern from side to side, to make sure that she was keeping to the track of the cart, Gertrude went steadily on. The tide was out now, so she knew that she would be able to get round Spit Head. But, of course, there would be no wheel-marks to guide her then, for the sea would have flattened out any and every impression which had been made on the sand.

They had stopped! Gertrude paused, and swinging the lantern to and fro she carefully examined the ground. Without doubt she was at the edge of the tide, and it was the highest that she had seen since the night in last autumn when the schooner was driven inshore and left high and dry on the boulders.

A little farther she went along the shore, keeping always above high-water mark, for she was anxious to find out if Jessica had veered inland again at some point farther on. But, although she searched for a quarter of a mile, never another trace of a wheel-mark did she see.

Then she went back, and, picking up the track at the place where she had found it disappear below high-water mark, she went forward across the white wet sands to round Spit Head. One hope she had, but it was so faint that it was hardly so much a hope as a bare possibility of hope. Right away beyond the head, and in the bay into which anyone cut off by the tide would be penned, there were a lot of big upstanding boulders. She wondered if by any possibility Jessica could have reached one of these with the babies, and might have hauled them up in safety to the top.

It was at the best a wild hope, for what could one person do with four infants and an obstinate old pony, which would of a certainty get more obstinate directly it realized that there was danger to be faced?

In extremity any rope will hold. That is to say, that what does not look possible at ordinary times seems quite feasible when it is the only thing 'twixt a person and despair.

It was not Gertrude's way to despair very easily. So now, when once she was round the head, and the whole of the rock-bound bay showed faintly in the ghostly after-glow, she sent out her voice in a ringing shout of: "Jessica! Jessica!"

A long pause of listening, and then it seemed to her strained fancy that she really heard a weak voice answering her, although probably it was either the result of her overstrained fancy or else the sharpness of her voice fetched an unexpected echo from the rocks. She started forward more briskly now, for every minute might be of importance.

Presently she stopped again to listen and then to shout, and again her ears deceived her, and she fancied that she heard a shout in response. She went on at a run then, while in imagination she pictured the condition of Jessica and the four babies. How cold they would be, poor things, and how frightened!

Supposing the cart had been washed away, or too much damaged to use, then she would have to carry two babies, while Marion carried the other two and Mr. Lorimer helped Jessica.

But why did they linger behind so far? Looking back for the first time, Gertrude realized that she was alone.

What had happened that they had not followed her? And how could she unassisted get Jessica and the babies back if the cart were damaged?

It was no use to stop, though, for had she not heard

Jessica shout? Was it Jessica who had answered her, or had she been deceived? A cold perspiration broke over her at this possibility, and she stopped again, calling loudly: "Jessica! Jessica!"

A faint sound reached her after a moment of intense listening, and she cried out in dismay to find that it was only a faint, faraway echo of her own tones which had come to her.

The tide was still quite high in the bay, and there were deep pools like lakes in miniature to be seen here and there. She had seen those pools before. Indeed, some of them were always there. They filled with every tide, but they never dried, and Victor Green had told her that they were very deep.

Perhaps there might be some wreckage of the cart caught in one of these pools. At least she must know, and so she went from one to the other, searching and searching, while a young moon got up from a bank of clouds and shone down on the water, catching a reflection in the quiet pools and showing a streak of silver out on the receding tide.

What was that?

Gertrude caught her breath in a sharp gasp as she rounded a great sandstone boulder and came in sight of another and wider pool up among the big rocks in one corner of the bay. Something was floating about; what it was she could not tell. It might only be a great tangle of seaweed, or it might be a human body.

"Oh, it is Jessica!" she cried. Her voice was so full of anguish that she did not recognize it for her own, and thought that someone else was there to weep and lament with her over this terrible thing which had happened.

"Where are you? where?" she cried sharply.

But there was no answer, no sound at all, saving the murmur of the sea and the gentle sough of the wind over

the rank herbage on the top of the rocks, where the forest came so close down to the sea.

"Jessica, darling Jessica, I will save you!" she cried, speaking now to that something which moved so gently up and down in the pool by the shore. Was it Jessica? And if so, was it possible that there was still any life left in her?

Gertrude did not stay to ask herself anything of the sort. Indeed, she never once doubted that it was her sister, and as she hastily dragged off her coat and boots, before plunging into the water, she mourned as she thought of what Jessica's grief would be to find that the outgoing tide had washed the babies out to sea.

It was so terrible to think of the toll that death had taken on that stormy April day! Why, oh why, had Jessica not listened to her warning and refrained from bringing the children to this place, where danger lay in wait for them?

"If only I had forbidden her coming here, instead of just telling her of what I had heard and bidding her be careful!" groaned Gertrude. She sat flat down on the sand to wrestle with her second boot, which would not come off easily.

There, she was free at last, and, wading into the water, which was very shallow at the edge of the pool, she tried to reach that something which floated.

It was surely a body! In the dim, uncertain light the outlines did not resemble those of Jessica; indeed, they were more like those of a man. She drew back with a start, but in that instant lost her footing, and plunged head first into deep water.

Half-choked and gasping she rose to the surface, and, striking out blindly, her hand lit on something slimy and cold, but which eluded her grasp, and was then swept farther away with the rush of the water.

## A Mysterious Inheritance

It was not Jessica. The knowledge that it was not her sister seemed to inspire her with fresh courage. She made a fresh effort, and now she really succeeded in reaching that something which had lured her into the tide pool.

Ah, to think that she had been so foolish! The thing which she had swam out to rescue was nothing more than a tangle of seaweed about the wreckage of some old boat, or a bit of driftwood which, floating in on the tide, had been caught and held in the tide pool.

In her plunge, and the subsequent struggle to get to the surface and to support herself on the water, Gertrude had gradually got far out on the pool, which was a big one and of unknown depth. She was getting a little frightened now, for she knew her limitations in the matter of swimming, and there was such a deadly cold in the water that she could scarcely move her limbs. Suppose she could not get out, and the others coming in search were to find her floating on the surface as she had thought that she had found Jessica! She could not endure the thought of what their trouble would be, and so she nerved herself for another big effort to reach the edge of the pool.

Two more yards, one more yard, and she would reach shallow water.

She did reach it. But she was so spent with the fright that her strength and her courage gave out together. Crawling on all-fours beyond the reach of the water she sank on the sand, and lay for a while unable to move.

It was her bodily discomfort which presently roused her. She was so fearfully cold, colder than she had ever been in her life before, or so it seemed to her.

The instinct to live was strong in her, and raising herself to a sitting posture she began beating her arms together, trying and trying to get a little circulation in them.

It was not Jessica, that weird something which she had

found floating on the tide pool. It was not Jessica, and so haply the little sister might be still alive, and she had risked her life—aye, and had nearly lost it—to bring a lump of wreckage and a tangle of seaweed ashore!

Then a great burst of weeping seized her, and, when that had passed, something akin to panic descended upon her. It was dreadful to be out on that lonely shore at night with no one within sound of her voice. Where was Marion? Why had not Mr. Lorimer come on with her? Was it possible that they had found something which she had missed?

Scrambling to her numbed feet, swaying, falling, and rising yet again, she turned back towards home, going at a sort of lurching run.

She could not run far; her strength had been too much sapped by the fright through which she had gone and the struggle for her life. She would have to go slowly at first if she wanted to reach home that night.

Turning back for her coat, which she had forgotten, she dragged it on over her dripping garments, and was thankful for the sensation of warmth that came to her. Then she thrust her feet into her boots, and, picking up the stick that she had cast aside when she prepared for her plunge, she set out once more to go back by the way that she had come.

She had supposed, when she rounded Spit Head in her search for Jessica, that the tide was going out. But, to her dismay, when she reached the sharp angle of the head she saw a line of silver rippling in the moonlight right up to the rocks that lay at the base of the promontory.

She was cut off by the tide! A long moment she stood pondering what was the best thing to be done.

Go back she would not. The bay might give her half an hour's longer space before she came in sight of the

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danger of drowning; but the rocks were harder to climb there than here, and she was going to put up the very best fight for her life.

She started forward at a run. Ah, how her limbs ached! There was a sense of dragging weight all over her, but she would not give way, for she was intent on reaching that line of silver which shimmered in the moonlight right up to the black outlines of the rocks at the base of the head.

Her thought was that if she made haste, frantic haste, she might round the angle of rock before the water was too high for wading. If only she could do that she would be all right. Only she would have to run past the angle of the next spit, where the sand lay in great billows along the shore, and the incoming tide crept up the hollows before anyone realized that it was there.

She reached the water, plunged boldly in, but lost her footing at the next step, and in a moment was fighting for her life. This time, too, she had the further disadvantage of being encumbered by her coat and boots.

## CHAPTER XX

### Bewilderment

MARION had but little knowledge to help her in dealing with a fainting man. Some few ideas there were in her head about giving the patient fresh air. But fresh air was here in plenty, so he could not need more of that. Then she remembered that people suffering in this fashion should be laid flat down, and at once she stretched Mr. Lorimer on the sand, and knelt beside him, trying hard to remember what she ought to do next.

Of course she might call to Gertrude to stop, for she would know what to do. Gertrude always seemed to know everything. But then, if there was anything like a chance to rescue Jessica it would be dreadful to imperil it by hindering Gertrude just now.

"Oh, do please get better quick, for it is too awful to think of any more trouble to-night!" groaned Marion, talking to Mr. Lorimer's unconscious figure as she chafed the limp hands and worked his legs up and down. Somewhere in the back of her mind she had an idea that people's limbs had to be moved in order to encourage circulation. But doubtless she had mixed up first aid to the drowning with the instructions for recovering a person from a swoon.

Presently, after what to her seemed like hours of exertion, but was probably only a few minutes, the man sighed heavily, and then opened his eyes.

"Why, what——?" he began, as if not understanding why he was lying out-of-doors, with one of the Miss

Amoynes hanging over him, showing so much concern in face and manner.

"Do you feel better?" asked Marion anxiously. She thought there must be something very wrong indeed to make a man faint. Women were silly like that sometimes, but that was chiefly because they were women, and she had supposed that men were made of sterner stuff.

"I feel rotten," he answered in a languid tone; then, remembering the catastrophe which threatened, he tried to struggle up to his feet. "But the children, we must find what has become of them."

"You must sit still for a little while, or else you will be turning queer again," said Marion in a tone of authority. She tried to think what was best to be done.

Should she leave the man here until she came back? But what would happen if her return were delayed and he tried to follow? He was so manifestly unfit, that she felt sure he would fall down if he attempted to walk. Then how would she manage to overtake Gertrude? She did not know the shore as well as the others. The long rambles they took by the sea always seemed to her such a dreary waste of time, and so she knew very little of the ins and outs of the coves, and bays, and the deep indentations of the coast line. She was sensible enough to see that a lot of valuable time and strength might be wasted in attempting to follow Gertrude, who must be so far away by now. She wondered if it would be possible to get Mr. Lorimer back to The Welcome Home, and to leave him in the care of Delia, while she went to summon some other neighbour to their help. She was prepared to rouse everybody in the district if need be, for surely never had they wanted assistance as badly as now.

Then she heard a sound, faint and far away at first,

a cry it was. At the sound Bruno lifted up his voice and howled dismally. The old dog had stayed with her instead of going on with Gertrude, only she had not noticed that he was there.

"Be quiet, you stupid old creature!" She gave him another cuff as she spoke, but as it was not much harder than an extra warm caress would have been, Bruno was in no way daunted, but howled worse than ever, and then Marion heard the voice again, and this time she caught the sound of her own name.

"Marion, Marion, Marion!"

"It is Gertrude, and she wants us!" exclaimed Marion eagerly, and she fairly shook the poor man, whom she was supporting with her arm until he should feel better. "Do you hear? Gertrude is calling me. Perhaps she has found them, or at least found that they did not go across the sands."

"It is no use; I am done!" groaned Mr. Lorimer, who looked so ghastly white in the moonlight that Marion feared he was going to faint again.

"You need not move; you can sit here quietly until I come back," replied Marion in a soothing tone. She was just going to leave him to take care of himself while she went to answer the summons of the voice, when she heard it calling again, only this time the burden of its cry, was:

"Gertrude, Gertrude, Marion, Marion!"

"It is not Gertrude, for she would certainly not call herself," she said in perplexity, and then she shouted back as loudly as she could: "Here I am; what do you want?"

"Gertrude, Gertrude, Marion, Marion," the voice was coming nearer, and suddenly Marion sprang to her feet with a great shout.

"Why, it is Delia; now I wonder what has happened?"

"Perhaps the bodies have been found," groaned Mr.

Lorimer, and he shivered with so much horror that she gave him a little shake by way of restoring him.

"Now do be sensible if you can, please," she said scornfully. "That is Delia who is calling me, and she does not sound very sad. Perhaps the children have been found all right, and we have had our scare for nothing. Here we are, Delia, make haste!"

No need to call to Delia to make haste, for she was running, and running as fast as she could come, uttering little incoherent ejaculations as she ran.

"Oh, I was afraid that I should not catch you up, and I have got the most fearful stitch in my side!" cried Delia, as she came within speaking distance.

"What is it?" cried Marion. "Why have you come?"

"Jessica and the babies are all right. I mean that they are not drowned, though they must have had a truly awful time," panted Delia. "The wheel came off that wretched cart when they were two miles wide of Mrs. Paterson's house, and they were caught in the storm, so that they were as wet through as if they had been sitting in the water. But they are safe, and the messenger should have reached us two hours ago, only his horse stepped in a hole, and flung him headlong, so that he was stunned, or something. A whole chapter of accidents, and a fine lot of anxiety for us."

"Now, thanks be to God for His great mercy!" exclaimed Mr. Lorimer, with a gasping sob of relief. At the sound of it Marion suddenly found her eyes full of tears.

"Poor dear little Jessica, how bad she must have felt! But oh, how much better than what we feared!"

"Which shows how dreadfully foolish it is to be always fearing the worst that can happen!" retorted Delia. "Oh, my poor side, how it aches!"

"That is because you ran so fast," said Marion; "but

it was good of you to come and put us out of our misery. Sit down a minute and have a rest." Her tones were more brusque than usual, because she was fighting that wild desire for tears that was so hard to keep in check.

"I don't want to sit down. Where is Gertrude?" Delia looked round as if she expected to find her sister crouching beside one of the boulders which strewed the ground at this part of the shore.

"She went on, following the track of the cart that was plain to be seen over the sand. We should have gone on too, and then you would have had a long way farther to come, but Mr. Lorimer was not well, and so I waited here with him until he felt better."

"I hope Gertrude has not gone round Spit Head, for the tide is running in again, and I am afraid that she will be cut off."

"She would surely notice about the tide," said Marion uneasily, a new dread taking the place of the one which the coming of Delia had dissipated.

"She might not think of it if she was worried about Jessica, and if she thought that Jessica had been caught by the tide in that bay beyond Spit Head she would go on never mind at what risk to herself. I will take Bruno and go after her, and do you go back home with Mr. Lorimer. I left the lamp burning, and the door on the latch. Nothing seemed to matter just then, except to let you know that there was no need to search for Jessica."

"But your side——" began Marion, although she knew that there was wisdom in the suggestion, for Delia was certainly better at running than she was herself. Moreover, Delia knew the shore so much better than she did.

"Oh, that is all right now, and I can slow up when it hurts again! Get on home as quick as you can, Marion, and do give Mr. Lorimer some supper before you let him go any farther, for he looks most fearfully ill."

Whistling to Bruno, Delia set off at a brisk pace along the sands. She was hatless, and her coat was only thrown round her shoulders, just as if she had not stayed to put her arms in the sleeves. The old dog gave one backward look at Marion, as if in doubt as to where his duty really lay; but when Marion flung out her hand in command for him to go with Delia, he trotted off with never another backward look. Marion being so much more at home than the others was always regarded by him in the light of mistress-in-chief, and to be obeyed accordingly.

Marion turned to Mr. Lorimer and offered him the support of her arm in getting back to The Welcome Home, for the poor man looked scarcely fit for even so much exertion.

"Would you like me to run home and hitch the horse to the wagon; it would not take me long," she said, seeing how weakly he walked.

"No, no, I can walk all right. But I was a bit bowled over when I thought that the children had come to grief," he answered. He essayed to stumble along the trail, but he swayed so much from weakness that Marion took him by the arm, holding him firmly because she was afraid that he would fall, and that she would not be able to get him on his feet again.

"Do you feel so ill?" she asked in kindly consideration.

"It is nothing. I have only got a sort of gone feeling. I'll be better when I can get a mouthful of food. You see, I haven't had anything since breakfast, for I was too busy to come in for eating in the middle of the day, and when I did get in, expecting to have my supper, the wife met me with the story of Jessica not having turned up with the babies, and so I came straight on without stopping for food."

"I do not wonder that you fainted; indeed I should have wondered more if you had not. But I think that it is little

short of wicked to play with one's strength in that fashion. It would have taken you about two minutes longer to have seized a big slice of bread, that you might have eaten as you walked." Marion's tone was severe, for she had little patience with people who were in too much hurry to take common-sense care of themselves, and so ended by giving a whole heap of trouble to other people.

"Yes, yes; quite true," he admitted, with such a pathetic air of being in the wrong that for very shame she could not scold him any more, but contented herself with abusing his wife instead for not looking after him better. Of course this abuse was of an entirely private sort, for she was not going to trouble the poor man any more than she could help.

Oh, the weariness of that mile from the shore to The Welcome Home! Truly the name of the place had a new significance to Marion when at last she saw the light in the window and the trim white and green of the house in the orchard!

The fire in the stove was low, but it was not out, and, making the weary man sit down in a comfortable camp-chair, Marion turned to the cupboard, and, getting out a bottle of beef-extract, carefully saved for times of emergency like this, she made a cup of hot, strong beef-tea, then stood over the exhausted man until he had drunk every drop of it. After this she made him eat some bread and butter, and then she let him set out on his way home. It was two long miles, and he was not fit for the walk, but what was she to do? Gertrude and Delia had not come back yet, and it was in her mind to put the horse in the wagon and drive down to the shore to meet them, for she was quite sure that they would both be nearly worn out.

It was very late, nearly midnight. The moon, which was a young one, would soon be down, and then it would probably be very dark indeed.

"Thank you very much, Miss Amoyne!" said Mr. Lorimer, before he went out through the orchard gate, "and I hope that your sisters will soon be home. It is a cruelly anxious night that we have had, and it will be a lesson to me in not letting things drift in future. Jessica has complained of that wheel wobbling some for a week or two past, and I guessed that it wanted looking to, but it got left. You know, there is always something left over at the end of the day."

"It would be better to attempt less, and then there would be less to get left. I think that neglect of this sort is criminal," replied Marion crisply. It was maddening to think that all the sick apprehension and keen anxiety might have been saved if only this man had seen to the wheel of the cart which had led to the trouble.

There was no sound of the girls returning along the trail, so, going back into the house, she made up the fire in the stove, and, putting the lamp out—for she was a thrifty soul, and not minded to waste the oil—she shut the door, but did not lock it, for if the girls should by any chance miss her on the way it would be, of all things, aggravating if they could not get into the house. Armed with a lantern, she went off to the barn and hitched the horse to the wagon, and then, bringing it out, went back to the house to make quite sure that they had not returned while she was in the barn. Finding the place silent and deserted, she drove out through the orchard gate, and took the trail to the shore.

It was beginning to rain again, and the night was very chill. Between weariness and the strain of anxiety she was by this time very cross indeed, and the things she said of Mr. Lorimer's business methods were anything but complimentary as she drove carefully down to the shore.

"I will talk to Gertrude, and I am sure that we can

manage to keep Jessica at home in future; then Mrs. Lorimer can have a proper hired girl to help her. Oh dear, where can Gertrude and Delia have got to?"

She asked that question many times later on, when she was out on the sands driving the horse slowly across the wide stretches of tide-washed sand or skirting the rough ground above high-water mark, for in places the sand was so soft that the wagon sank nearly to the axle, and then she had to get down and lend her strength to that of the horse to get the thing out and on to firmer ground.

She was shouting and swinging her light, for well she knew how easy it would be to miss them in the dark. The moon was out of sight now, and the clouds were so thick that there was no light of stars.

A long way she had gone. She was wet, tired, and thoroughly miserable when she drew the horse to a stand, and listened hard once more for an answer to her shouting. She was telling herself that it was not of much use to go any farther.

Then away somewhere in the distance she heard a hail. That was Delia, she was sure of it, and a sob of thankfulness came up in her throat as she waved her lantern and shouted back. Turning the horse with its head to the water, which was nearly at high tide, she skirted the shore for perhaps another quarter of a mile, and at length reached the place where Delia was kneeling by an inanimate figure.

"What is the matter?" she cried hoarsely. "What has happened to Gertrude?"

Delia was panting, and very much out of breath, but she managed to gasp out: "Gertrude has been nearly caught by the tide. I found her swimming and trying to make the shore; but she had her coat on and her boots, so she was most fearfully hampered, and I was only just in time to help her out. She seems to have had some fearful

shock, and was trying to tell me how she thought that she had seen Jessica's body floating on a tide pool. Then she tried to stand up, and of course promptly fainted."

"She is coming round," said Marion briefly. She was on her knees now by the side of Gertrude, loosening the things at her sister's neck, calling her endearing names and scolding her all in a breath.

"What could have made her faint?" asked Delia.

"Plenty of things," replied Marion crossly, for she was feeling that she had had more than her share of swooning folks to look after that night. "Picture to yourself how Gertrude must have felt when she thought that Jessica and those babies had been caught by the tide and drowned!"

"We have all felt pretty bad to-night, I fancy." Delia shivered as she spoke, for she was tired, damp, and wretched.

But Marion's whole attention was centred on Gertrude, who was recovering fast.

"That is right, dear. You will soon be better now. There is nothing wrong with Jessica, except that I expect the poor dear girl will have a most shocking cold. The irony of it all is that none of these things need have happened if only Mr. Lorimer had attended to that wheel when it began to wobble." Marion was wiping Gertrude's face and smoothing her hair, getting her back to the normal condition of things as fast as possible.

"You are sure that Jessica is all right?" asked Gertrude weakly.

"Yes, yes; she is quite safe, and is stopping for the night at Mrs. Paterson's house, because she and the babies were caught in the rain and just drenched. I expect that Mrs. Paterson will be frightened out of her wits if all the babies cry at once. It must be as good as a picture show, and I would love to have a front seat!" Marion gurgled with irrepressible laughter, and then grew suddenly grave

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"SHE WAS ON HER KNEES BY THE SIDE OF GERTRUDE"



again, remembering the terrible anxiety through which they had just passed.

"Gertrude ought to walk home, because she is so wet," said Delia, who seemed to have grown older and more thoughtful under the pressure of all that had been put upon her in the way of endurance that night.

"Then I will walk with her, and do you ride, Delia. There is no sense in all of us getting worn out to-night." Marion's manner was quick and authoritative, so Delia scrambled up in the wagon without further protest, and the homeward walk began.

Holding to the back of the wagon with one hand, and clinging to Marion's supporting arm with the other, Gertrude plodded wearily forward, and found that the exercise was taking away some of the deadly chill which had seized her in the tide pool.

The way seemed endless because she was so tired. She felt as if she were walking in her sleep, and was half-dreaming that the tramp, tramp, tramp was to go on for years and years, when Delia from the wagon uttered an exclamation of surprise, and a moment later there was a shout in men's voices:

"Hi, there! whose wagon are you?"

"Amoyne, from The Welcome Home. What do you want?" called Marion, her clear, fearless tones ringing through the gloom, although Delia's teeth were chattering from a vague alarm at being hailed in this fashion at dead of night in such a solitary place.

They were just at the spot where the trail turned inland from the shore, and as they halted the wagon they saw two men coming across the sand from the opposite direction, and they toiled along under a burden of some sort.

"Can you help us?" asked one of the men. "We have been prospecting along the shore between here and Forme Head, but we were caught in the storm, and then we had

to wait until the tide went down to get back to our camp. We had almost decided to camp for the night under the lee of some rocks, when we came upon the body of a man that had been washed inshore by the last tide, and we are bringing him along to the nearest house."

"A dead man!" quoth Marion fearfully, as she took a step nearer to the strangers, and then halted suddenly. Gertrude was clinging with both hands to the wagon for support now, and Delia's teeth chattered worse than ever.

"Yes, he is dead, and has been for some days, I should say," replied the man who had spoken before. Then he burst out in a different tone. "But we could not leave him where we found him, for the sea to take him back again. It was him to-day, but it might have been me or my mate to-morrow; and the dead are sacred, or should be."

"Ah yes; and, think of it, girls, it might have been Jessica!" cried Gertrude; and there was such a thrill in her tone that Delia sobbed aloud, for indeed it might have been Jessica.

"What do you want us to do?" asked Marion. A minute ago she would have refused to do anything, but that mention of Jessica had made her heart wonderfully tender.

"Help us to get the body to the nearest magistrate," replied the man promptly. "Isn't there a place not far from here called Poplar Ridge? And isn't there a magistrate living there?"

"Yes, of course; Wilberforce Washington is a magistrate; but it is three miles away, and think of the time!" There was a scandalized note in Marion's voice, for affairs were altogether too much out of the ordinary to suit her.

"I know it is late—so late that we did not expect to find anyone about—and we had made up our minds to rouse the people at the first house we came to; but houses don't seem to be very plentiful in this neighbourhood," said the

man; then he added: "My mate is nearly knocked up, or I would not be asking help, especially of women. Could you lend us your wagon and direct us to Poplar Ridge?"

But there was a prudent streak in Marion's character. These men were strangers. Suppose they walked away with the horse and wagon! Anyhow, if they did not know the way to Poplar Ridge they would hardly be able to take the trail in the dark.

"You could not find the way alone," she said, speaking with her usual brisk decision. "Delia and I will have to come with you, and Gertrude must stay at home, with Bruno for a guard."

"We should not like to trouble you so much, miss," protested the man who had not spoken before; but there was such a ring of weariness in his voice that Marion insisted, in spite of a half-uttered protest from Delia, who saw her night's rest being cut still more short.

But Gertrude sided with Marion. In view of the great deliverance which they had experienced that night from a sorrow which would have shadowed their lives, this extra toil seemed but a little thing.

Delia hopped down from the wagon seat, and went to the head of the horse; then the two men lifted their burden, and laid it reverently in the wagon. Nice men, Marion decided they must be, because of the reverent way in which they handled what had once been a man like themselves.

The man who was so nearly spent got into the wagon with the dead, but the other walked with Gertrude and Marion until they reached the orchard gate of The Welcome Home. Then Gertrude went indoors, and the others held on the trail to Poplar Ridge. It had ceased to rain, and the stars were shining. Marion had gone forward and walked with Delia, while both men rode with the dead. It was an awesome progress, and the girls walked in silence, while the two men in the wagon were

silent also. The cocks were beginning to crow when they came at last to the long low shed which was the store and dwelling-house of Wilberforce Washington, magistrate and magnate of Poplar Ridge.

It was amazing to both the girls what a lot of waking the man wanted. Indeed, in the end, it was Victor Green who responded to their summons, and poked his head from the window to know what all the noise was about. Having got him awake, however, all the rest was easy, for he not only woke W. W., but two or three other near dwellers also, and there were men in plenty to listen to the story of what the sea had given up that night, and to lift the quiet figure from the wagon and carry it into a convenient shed.

It was Victor, too, who had the kindly thought to bring a bucket of water and a broom, and scrub out the floor of the wagon, and then he put a bundle of oat straw over the damp boards to keep the feet of the two girls warm on the ride back to The Welcome Home.

The dawn was breaking before they reached the house in the orchard, to be met with a joyous welcome from Bruno. But Gertrude was fast asleep, and they would not wake her yet, and they crept about with noiseless tread to get breakfast ready. There was no time to go to bed now—the farmer's day must begin early, in the springtime, and it must end late. But perhaps for both of them there would come a few hours of rest in the middle of the day, especially as it was an off day from the factory.

Breakfast and a good wash revived them a little, and they were going about the morning tasks in a rather listless fashion, while Gertrude, who had just risen, was talking of taking the wagon over to Paterson's place to bring Jessica home, when a messenger arrived in hot haste from Poplar Ridge, summoning Gertrude to the enquiry on the death of the man whose body had been rescued from the shore last night.

"Is it really necessary for me to come?" she asked, too ignorant of the law to understand that the summons was a command that must be obeyed.

"Of course you must come, or be sent to prison for contempt of court," announced Victor, he having brought the message, as there was no one else who could be spared to do it. "Besides, as it happens, you are a very much interested party, for they are saying that the fellow brought in last night is Douglas Amoyne—that cousin of yours that did you such a bad turn by coming to life when he ought by rights to have been dead."

"Oh, it is not possible that he is dead!" cried Gertrude, and there was so much dismay on her face that Victor stared at her in open-mouthed amazement.

"Why, you look as if you are sorry!" he exclaimed.

"So I am!" she answered, and then could not speak another word for the tears that came up in her eyes and the sob which caught her in the throat. It was dreadful to think of that vigorous young man who had helped them, and then who had set out so cheerfully on his twenty-miles ride that morning—oh, it was dreadful to think of him as being identical with that grim burden which the sea had given up last night.

"How do you know it is Douglas Amoyne?" asked Marion, pressing forward to the side of Gertrude.

"Evidence found on the body," snapped out Victor with what he chose to consider was professional brevity. "Miss Amoyne will have to identify the man as her cousin, and then you will all be rich again, and can quit this farming work."

"Which I certainly shall not do," said Marion softly, but she gave a troubled glance in the direction of Gertrude.

"Shall I go with you, Gertrude?" asked Delia. "It will be horrid for you to have to go alone."

"We will take care of Miss Amoyne; but of course we shall be very pleased to have your company," said Victor, with a grand flourish, which made them smile in spite of their sadness, and it is surprising how sad they were. It had never occurred to any of them that they would feel such grief over a man of whom they knew so little.

"I am sure that I cannot identify the man," said Gertrude, and again that inconvenient sob caught her in the throat.

"Ah well, you have got to come and try!" rejoined Victor.

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Nameless One

THE two strangers who had found the dead man on the shore had left Poplar Ridge before Gertrude and Delia reached the house of Wilberforce Washington in the morning. They had given W. W. instructions where to find them if the police wanted them. Their own business was pressing, and, as he had no authority to keep them, he had to let them go.

There was evidence in plenty—so W. W. told Gertrude—to show that the dead man in life had been named Douglas Amoyne. A knife was there—a very well-made article—and it had Douglas Amoyne on a small silver plate let in on the handle; there was a pipe that was named in the same way, and a tiny tobacco-box with D. A. on the lid.

In spite of these things, Gertrude could not say, when she looked in the face of the dead man, that she had ever seen him before.

“Can you identify him?” asked W. W., who was very solemn and important this morning, as befitted a magistrate under such circumstances.

“No,” she answered, and then stared at Victor in amazement, wondering why he was making such grimaces, and in dumb show imploring her to do something.

“Then we must ask your sister to come in and view the remains,” said W. W., with a nod to Victor to bring Delia into the shed where the dead man had been laid.

“Oh no, please no; this is no sight for a child like Delia!” There was sharp annoyance in the tone of Gertrude,

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"I am very sorry, Miss Amoyne, but I must do my duty in the absence of the police, for whom I have sent." W. W. waved his hands and closed his eyes with an air of abject apology, although in reality he was enjoying himself amazingly, for it was not often such a sensation came to Poplar Ridge, and so he was bound to make the most of it. He had sent for the police at dawn, but it might be hours before they arrived on the scene, and until they came he was of course in charge of proceedings, and there was in his mind a great desire to magnify his office.

Gertrude said no more. If this thing had to be, then it was of no use to protest, and of course Delia had been obliged to take her share in the work of bringing the body in last night, so perhaps it would not upset her so much as if it had been Jessica; and how glad she was that Jessica could be spared this ordeal, which had been so trying for herself!

"Look here, Miss Delia, W. W. has sent for you to come and identify the remains," announced Victor, coming out to where Delia was holding the horse in the sunshine.

"What for?" she asked, looking at him with surprise.

Victor wagged his head in a sorrowful fashion. "I made eyes at Miss Amoyne, but she isn't sharp in some things, although downright clever in an ordinary way. If she had said that to the best of her belief the poor fellow in yonder was her cousin Douglas, then there would have been no more trouble for any of you. But she said that she could not tell, and so you have got to go in."

"Suppose I can't tell either; what then?" asked Delia. She turned very white. She was so tired from her sleepless night, her nerve was down, and it seemed a horrible thing to be obliged to go into that shed and force herself to look at the face of the dead man lying there.

Victor shrugged his shoulders. "In that case, I shall have to take the wagon over to The Welcome Home and

bring Miss Marion into the town, to see if she can tell who the poor chap was, and every hour of delay makes it the more unpleasant—don't you see? Now W. W. has made up his mind that the man is, or rather was, your cousin what is keeping you out of your money, and, having a kind heart at the bottom, he means to settle this matter once and for all, and to see that you get your money all right again. He does not think that he is prejudiced, but all the same he won't rest until one of you says that you can remember this to be the young man that helped you out from under your tents when you were washed out. So if you will take a word of advice from me you will just walk into that shed as steady as you can, and when he draws the sheet from the face of the corpse you will shut your eyes and say that to the best of your belief that is the man whom you saw that day on the shore, and afterwards discovered to have been your cousin Douglas Amoyne."

"If I did that, and the real man ever turned up afterwards, how do you suppose that I should feel?" demanded Delia stormily. She had a real liking for this little under-sized orphan, who did a man's work, and always smiled, despite the hardships of his life; but she certainly felt that he might be improved from a moral standpoint.

Victor gave another shrug. It was a trick he had learned from his master, for he was imitative as a monkey.

"Mistakes will happen. But there are nine chances to one that, if it is not the right man, he will never come to bother you. And why shouldn't you have the money if you can get it?"

"Because I don't want money that I have no right to!" replied Delia with a scorn so withering that Victor felt properly snubbed. She walked into the shed, and, clenching her hands tightly, forced herself to look at that poor battered face which had come back from the sea.

"Is that the man you saw last summer?" asked Wilber-

force Washington, so eagerly that Delia would have been puzzled indeed to understand him if it had not been for the light which Victor had shed on his motives.

"I cannot tell," she said, turning her head quickly. Then, catching sight of the knife which lay with the pipe and the tobacco-box, she said quickly: "I have seen that knife before, or one exactly like it."

"Where?" demanded W. W., and there was a challenge in his tone, as if he were daring her to upset the theory which he had formed regarding this poor waif from the sea.

"Our cousin, Douglas Amoyne, had one like it; that is, the handle and the shape were alike. There was a name-plate also, only I could not see what there was on it, of course, because he was holding it in his hand."

"That settles the question of identity beyond doubt, I think," said the man, with a triumphant air; and to look at him one would have supposed it was he who was to inherit the money of Joseph Amoyne if this dead man could be proved to be the missing son.

"Not necessarily," put in Gertrude quietly. "I cannot identify the man, nor can my sister, and who is to say that he did not take the things from the deserted tent out on the shore of Clamping Bay? I do not know whether the knife was there, but I certainly saw one or two pipes lying about, and those that I saw were initialed as this one is."

W. W. looked at her with positive horror in his face. What possessed the girl, he wondered, that she should be so anxious to throw away a good chance of money which, he was positive, was rightly hers and her sisters'? There was no accounting for women anyhow, and he supposed that she was born with a desire to be contrary.

"Very well, if you cannot identify him we must send for your sisters," he remarked, with a touch of resignation

which was really comic, or would have been if anyone had been able to appreciate humour in any shape or form that morning.

A look of distress came into the eyes of Gertrude. She was thinking not so much of Marion, whose nerves were stronger, but of Jessica. It would be a terrible ordeal for the little one to face. Surely, surely there must be some way out of it; but where?

W. W. held a hasty consultation with his companions in authority, during which Gertrude and Delia went out of the shed, and seated themselves in the wagon pending developments. They were so very tired and unnerved with all the strain of the night that was past, and would have been only too thankful for a chance of rest. But they had to wait until either W. W. was satisfied or the police arrived on the scene. The horse stood dozing in the sunshine, and Gertrude sat on the front seat with Delia leaning against her shoulder. In less than ten minutes Delia was as fast asleep as if she were lying on her little camp-bed at The Welcome Home.

Mrs. Washington came running out of her house to beg that the two girls would come in and rest awhile. But Gertrude shook her head in smiling refusal. She was not going out of sight of the door of that shed until she knew how the matter of identification was going to be settled.

Victor had driven off hastily with a new horse of his employers hitched to W. W.'s best wagon, and she supposed that he had gone to fetch either Marion or Jessica. She could only pray that it might be Marion.

"If only those men had left that poor body on the shore for the tide to take it back!" she kept saying to herself. She wondered if it were really her cousin Douglas whose body had been found last night, and she thought of all that it would mean to them if it could be proved that it was the son of her late uncle who lay in the shed yonder.

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"It is funny, but I don't think that I want the money half as much as I did!" she exclaimed to herself, speaking aloud, although she was quite unconscious of doing so.

"And I am sure that I don't want it!" murmured Delia sleepily. She had been roused by the sound of her sister's voice, and had said the first thing which came into her head; then she settled herself more comfortably, and was asleep again in less than no time.

Gertrude was so drowsy that she could scarcely keep awake, and the group of loungers near the store found very little to interest them for the next hour. Then things began to brisk up a little. A couple of mounted police rode in from Glastongarry, and at the sight of the uniform Gertrude's courage revived a little, for with the police on the scene W. W. could no longer have things all his own way, which was a comfort of a sort. Ten minutes later, and before the important W. W. had finished giving his theories to the police regarding the happenings of the night, Victor returned driving Marion in the wagon.

Gertrude immediately got out from her wagon and went over to speak to Marion, but W. W., having got it into his head that Gertrude was wilfully upsetting the ends of justice from sheer feminine perversity, declared that she must not talk to her sister until Marion had seen whether she could identify the poor nameless one who lay in his last long sleep in yonder.

Gertrude turned away with a sick impatience.

"He means all right," murmured Delia sleepily. "You know what an obstinate creature he is, and, having made up his mind that it is our cousin who came back from the sea, nothing will persuade him to the contrary, and he looks upon us as actual personal foes of his own, because we will not say that we are quite positive that this is the man who helped us last summer."

"I hope that Marion will be able to satisfy him one way

or the other," groaned Gertrude; "for it is awful to think that Jessica may be dragged here to face such an ordeal."

"Here comes Marion—and, oh! look at the face of our esteemed friend the magistrate; he seems to have suffered a considerable disappointment," Delia, the graceless one, gurgled with laughter.

"Don't, dear; it is too sad!" cried Gertrude, for the tragedy in yonder oppressed her horribly.

Marion came walking towards them with her head carried in a determined fashion. Her face was rather pale, and her mouth was set in tense lines, but that was all. She was talking to one of the policemen who walked at her side, while Wilberforce Washington, with all the pomposity gone from him, hung nervously in the background.

"I am so sorry that you and Delia have had all this trouble, and the misery of waiting about," said Marion, her brisk voice a shade less cheerful than usual in deference to what lay in yonder.

"Were you able to identify the—the——" But Gertrude faltered and shivered, unable to get out what she wanted to say.

"That is not the man who came to our help last summer," replied Marion positively. "He was a young man, you remember; but the poor fellow in there has a lined face and grey hair. There is also a pock mark plain to be seen on his forehead, and there was nothing of the kind on the face of Douglas when we bade him good-bye that morning when he rode away to give notice to the salvage people about the schooner."

"Why, Marion, how clever of you!" cried Delia, and then she exclaimed in a naïve tone: "You must have looked at the dead man!"

"Of course; that is what I went for," retorted Marion brusquely, and then she admitted frankly: "I don't say that I should have done it, only I was determined that

Jessica should not be dragged into the business; so I screwed my courage, and I had my reward, for of course it is a comfort to know one way or the other."

"G—r—r—r! I did not shut my eyes, because W. W. would have spotted me doing it; but I did what Mme Delarey called obliterating my mental vision, that is, I approached it with my eyes wide open but my thoughts concentrated far, far away," and Delia shrugged her shoulders in distaste for the mere recollection of the ordeal.

"Can you drive me home, before you go across to Mrs. Paterson's place to see how Jessica is this morning?" asked Marion. "W. W. is so disappointed with me because I have failed him, that I am sure he will be angry if I ask for Victor to drive me, and it won't take you much longer to go round by the shore."

"Yes, come along; I was going that way, for Delia is so tired that she falls asleep under the slightest provocation," answered Gertrude. The three packed themselves into the wagon and drove away, watched by the crowd of loungers, which had grown much larger since the arrival of the police.

"I expect they are all pitying us for our stupidity in throwing away a chance of a fortune," said Delia, with a motion of her head towards the little crowd as the horse trotted round the bend in the trail, and so out of sight.

"Money may be too hardily gained when one has to lose peace of mind in the process," said Gertrude. Her thoughts went back to her mental struggles last autumn.

"Just so; and it was to the last degree embarrassing that the onus of identification should be thrown upon us," replied Marion. She went on in a worried tone: "But I do wonder what has happened to that young man, for I saw the knife in his hand: he was cutting a rope, and I remember thinking what a handsome knife it was."

"Probably it was taken from the tent, although I do

not remember seeing it there," said Gertrude; "but of course there were a great many things that I did not see, for I looked at very little."

Marion shook her head in dissent from this theory. "Douglas had the knife in his hand, and I saw him put it in his pocket, so that it is not likely he would have left it behind him when he went for his bicycle. My own fear is that something happened to him afterwards. Perhaps he was killed or something, and then this nameless one got hold of the knife."

"What a mystery it all is!" cried Delia. "My head fairly whirls when I think of it, and, oh dear, I am so tired!"

"You shall go straight to bed when we get back, and I will drive round to Mrs. Paterson's place to see how Jessica is. I shall bring her home if I can. Then this afternoon we will send Marion to bed."

"That is, of course, if Marion can be induced to go. At present my ideas are all concerned with the planting of potatoes. It seems rather shocking to think of going to bed while the sun is shining," laughed Marion. She whipped up the horse, for she had taken the reins for the homeward drive, and the rest of the journey was performed almost in silence.

Delia was asleep again before they reached The Welcome Home, and the two elders were too busy with their thoughts to talk very much.

Mr. Lorimer was walking round and round the house when they got back, while Bruno barked loudly as if defying him, although the stupid old dog must have known that so near a neighbour would hardly have evil intentions on the place.

"I am glad that you have come," he said, as he came out to open the orchard gate for them. "Have you been to our place?"

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"No; we have had to go to Poplar Ridge," said Gertrude; then she asked quickly: "How is Jessica?"

"I was coming about her. She is in bed at Mrs. Paterson's, and my wife wants to know if one of you will go over and see to her, for Mrs. Paterson is making a great fuss about having her place invaded by such a crowd. Of course things were a bit thick last night, with four babies, and your sister so spent that she could only lie in bed. Mrs. Paterson told Mrs. Lorimer this morning that she sat on one side of the stove nursing the twins, while Paterson sat on the other side nursing the other two, and there was not a single ten minutes the whole night long when one or the other of the four was not yelling fit to lift the roof off. But they are all asleep now."

The girls laughed. It was impossible to keep serious at the picture of the woes of the childless man and his wife who suddenly had had four babies thrust upon them.

"I am going there," said Gertrude. She had jumped down from the wagon as she spoke, and, running into the house, she reappeared a moment later with an armful of cushions and rugs, which she put into the back of the wagon.

"If Jessica was bad enough to stay in bed and leave the babies to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Paterson I expect it means that she will not be feeling very fit now," she said to Marion.

"However bad she is, mind that you bring her home, Gertrude," said Marion. "I could not bear for her to be ill over there; Mrs. Paterson never seems to understand the art of being comfortable." She followed Gertrude to the gate and saw her take the trail to the shore.

Of choice Gertrude would have given the shore a wide berth this morning, but it was the best way of reaching the Paterson homestead, and time was precious, seeing that so much had been wasted at Poplar Ridge.

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The morning was radiant with sunshine and the air was sweet and soft. The winter was past, and summer was coming. Oh, it was a beautiful world! Gertrude would have been as lighthearted as any of the noisy birds which were rioting in the low bushes fringing the shore, if it had not been for the depression caused by the sadness of the fate of the unknown man whom she had failed to identify that morning.

Turning inland, after she had skirted the shore for some distance, it was not long before she came to the cart which had broken down yesterday with such dire results in the shape of the anxiety the affair had caused to everyone concerned.

The place was nearly two miles from the abode of the Patersons, and it was puzzling to know how Jessica could have managed to get the children safely to shelter.

"Poor little girl, it must have been a dreadful experience for her!" murmured the elder sister. She had to get out of the wagon to lead her horse past the broken-down cart, for the creature was disposed to shy at it in a most unaccountable manner, even trying to turn round and do a bolt to get away from a thing so fearsome as a broken-down cart.

Talking to it, and patting it, she led the snorting animal right up to the derelict and tried to explain how very harmless it all was, then, leading it on a little farther, she got into the wagon again and drove with all haste to the ugly little house where the Patersons lived.

At the sound of approaching wheels Mrs. Paterson came hurriedly forth to see who it was that had come, and, although she brightened a little at the sight of Gertrude, to whom she knew herself to be heavily indebted, it was plain that she felt her grievance was a really big one.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Amoyne," she exclaimed,

eager to pour the story of her wrongs, real and supposed, into a sympathetic ear, "for you may be trusted to straighten things out a little, and really it has been a bit thick for the last few hours."

But Gertrude wanted to know how it fared with Jessica, and burst into hasty questioning before Mrs. Paterson had time to start on the subject of her grievances.

"How is Jessica; can I go to her?" and coming straight up to Mrs. Paterson she looked fully prepared to walk over her if the woman did not get out of the way.

"It is time someone came to look after her. Disgraceful, I call it, to leave a poor girl to fend for herself as that child has had to do. It was shameful to send a young girl like that out with a menagerie full of babies, and really you could not call it anything else, and such babies! My husband said that he had never heard children yell like it in his life, and I am sure that I had not. Yes, I put her in my bed, and stayed up all night myself; indeed I could do no less, remembering that you had done a good part by me."

Gertrude passed into the bedroom, leaving Mrs. Paterson to talk on to an empty room; her concern was for the little sister who had such a bad experience in yesterday's storm.

"Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude, why did you not come sooner?" cried Jessica, sitting up in the tumbled, unwholesome-looking bed, and stretching out imploring arms to her sister.

"I did not know what had happened, and we were out on the shore searching for you nearly all last night," said Gertrude. She gathered Jessica into her arms, holding the poor child fast, and understanding something of the misery that she must have suffered.

"It was just dreadful when that wheel came off, for Dossie and Jack were thrown out on to the trail, and the

pony began to kick. I dared not leave him to pick up the children, for I was afraid that he would smash the cart and kill the twins; so I got him out of the harness as quick as I could, and when he was free of the cart he stood quiet enough. But I did not know what to do, for it was storming so hard, the children were crying, and the rain was coming down at a pour."

"It was really dreadful for you; but never mind, it is over now, and Mr. Lorimer says that the children are all right. Gertrude tried to make as light of the matter as possible, for Jessica looked feverish and it was plain that she had been badly overtaxed.

"I can't forget it easily. Were you ever out with four babies that could not walk, when the rain was coming down as if it was being shot out of a bucket, and the thunder was crackling right over your head?" Jessica strained closer and closer into the sheltering arms that were round her.

"No, indeed I was not, and I can't think how you managed to get them all to shelter."

"I had to do something, or I believe that they would all have died, poor mites." Jessica sobbed again in recollection of her direful plight. "I put Jack on the back of the pony—he was such a good little man, though he howled with terror like the rest—then I tucked Dossie under one arm, and I had to carry the twins as best I could by their clothes, and I thought that my arms would have been dragged out; they are aching still."

"But, dear, it is over, and you were very brave, so why worry about it now?"

"I can't help it; I can't sleep for the bother of it all, and I have had a dreadful night. I could not sleep because the children cried so badly, and Mr. and Mrs. Paterson grumbled at each other so dreadfully because they could not keep the poor babies quiet. Oh, Gertrude, you will

not leave me here to-night; please say you won't, for I cannot bear it!"

"Indeed I will not leave you here. I am going to take you home straightaway; that is what I came for. Where are your clothes?" Gertrude looked round the untidy room in search of her sister's garments.

"They are over in that corner by the table, I think; that is where I undressed."

"But they are wet, as wet as when you took them off!" exclaimed Gertrude in dismay.

"Are they? Then I suppose that Mrs. Paterson forgot to dry them. She had the children's clothes to dry, for we were all wet through, you see. But you will take me home, Gertrude; I can wrap myself in this quilt, and we can go by the shore, where we are not likely to meet any people, or I could put on the wet clothes for such a short journey."

"Oh, you must not do that; you would take the most fearful cold. I will see if Mrs. Paterson will lend you some dry things, and if she cannot I must just go home and fetch some." Gertrude went in search of the mistress of the house, to borrow what was needful for the journey.

Mrs. Paterson promptly placed the whole of her wardrobe at the disposal of Jessica, and seemed so relieved to find that Gertrude did not intend returning without her sister that she was willing to do anything and everything to forward the going of the unwanted guest.

"I was afraid that you would want her to stay until she was better, and, having only one bed, of course it makes it cruel awkward having company, and then my health is so poor that I can't stir round and do things like some people," said the woman.

"Of course you cannot, and I am sorry that Jessica kept you out of your bed last night, although I am afraid that with so many babies to take care of you would not

have had a very peaceful night in any case." Gertrude bent her head lower over the box from which she was taking garments for her sister, so that Mrs. Paterson should not see her laughing because of the mental picture she had of last night's tribulations.

"It was a truly awful experience, and I should think that if anyone in this wide world is to be pitied it is Mrs. Lorimer, for it stands to reason that she has most of the trouble of them!" and Mrs. Paterson flung up her hands in dismay.

"Gertrude, I can't wear such things, I really can't!" groaned Jessica, as Gertrude brought a coat and skirt of a fearful bilious green, much trimmed with cord and many little gilt buttons, also a hat wreathed in roses of a vermilion hue with leaves of a most unnatural green. "I would rather go wrapped only in these bed-clothes."

"Dear, she means it so kindly. These are her very best things, and she will be so hurt if you refuse," pleaded Gertrude in a whisper. Because of a something in her sister's eyes, Jessica put on the hideous garments without further disclaimer, although she set her teeth hard and resolutely turned her back on the looking-glass.

"My word, you look quite the lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Paterson, when Jessica, wearing the green costume and the hat with the vermilion roses, came out from the sleeping chamber. "I always thought that was a tasty turn-out, and now I know it. There is style there and a regular swanky look. I haven't troubled to dress up much lately, but if only there is a preaching service at any house within twenty miles of here I will make Mr. Paterson yoke out and take me to meeting, for what is the use of having good clothes if one never wears them?"

"What indeed!" murmured Gertrude, and she stooped to straighten an imaginary crease in the green skirt, so that her face might be hidden from the good woman.

She wanted to laugh so badly that she really suffered until they were out of sight of the Paterson homestead, and poor disgusted Jessica was sitting very straight and stiff against the cushions that were piled around her.

Then the merriment would have its way, and Gertrude burst into a peal of merriment which startled the horse into a gallop, so that the wagon swayed, bumped, and bounced along the uneven road, and the two were tumbled up and down like dry peas in a pod.

"It is all very well for you to laugh. You would feel different if you had to wear them!" groaned Jessica.

"Oh, please forgive me; but if only you could know how badly I yearned to laugh when Mrs. Paterson said that you looked quite a lady!" Again Gertrude went into a fit of merriment.

But there were actual tears in the eyes of Jessica. "It is horrid, horrid to be made a fifth-of-November guy in this fashion, and then to be laughed at. You ought to have more feeling for me, Gertrude."

"Try to imagine that you are acting a charade, and are got up to represent a London coster's sweetheart on a Bank holiday, then you will not feel so bad."

"I have never seen a London coster's sweetheart on a Bank holiday, so how should I know what she would look like? If only we could have kept Uncle Joseph's money, of course, I might have had a chance of understanding such things better." Jessica sighed in a pathetic fashion, while the red roses nid-nodded over the brim of that ridiculous hat, and Gertrude choked back another outburst of laughter.

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Passing Cloud

GERTRUDE and Marion looked at each other in perplexity.

It was the evening of the day that Jessica had been brought home from the house of Mrs. Paterson. She had gone to bed directly she reached home, but feeling better had got up to supper, and it was while they were lingering over the supper table that the trouble arose.

Delia was not at home, for, mindful of the burdens of Mrs. Lorimer, she had gone over to offer her assistance in putting the children to bed, so that the tired mother might get a little spell of much-needed rest.

Then Marion had been giving Jessica a humorous version of the happenings of the previous night, and of the experience of the morning, when Wilberforce Washington had hauled the lot of them over to Poplar Ridge in order that they might identify the poor man who had been found in the tide pool.

"He was Cousin Douglas without a doubt, and now we can have our money again! Oh, Gertrude, what a blessed thing it was that those strange men found that body on the shore, or we might never have known!" cried Jessica, starting up with shining eyes and a face that was absolutely transfigured with joy.

"Dear, we do not believe that it was Douglas," said Gertrude quietly. "I looked at the man and could see nothing to recognize, nor could Delia. Then Marion, who was the most observant of the three of us, noticed that

this poor fellow had grey hair and a pock mark on his forehead, neither of which had the young man who helped us last summer."

"All the same, I am sure that it was Douglas, and you have foolishly thrown away our one chance of getting our money again. Now we may never have another, and shall be poor and struggling to the end of our days. It is cruel, cruel of you all!" and putting her head down on the table Jessica burst into miserable weeping.

It was then that Gertrude and Marion looked at each other in such dire perplexity, both of them praying inwardly for wisdom to deal with this most uncomfortable trait in the character of the little sister.

"Don't be silly, Jess! If we were starving, and had no roof to shelter us, you could not take on more about our poverty," said Marion brusquely. To her contented mind they seemed very well off indeed. There was always enough to eat, they had garments to wear, and work that was a pleasure to do, and she at least asked for no greater good fortune than this. Coming, as she did, of a sturdy independent stock, it was the privilege of being her own mistress and ordering her days as she chose which appealed most to Marion, and her days of hard work on The Welcome Home were some of the happiest that she had ever known.

"I don't believe that you wanted it to be Douglas, and that was why you said that he had grey hair and a pock mark, and so it could not be he," said Jessica, her tears drying up before the flame of her indignation. She sat up straight to look at Marion. "How do you know that he did not contract smallpox after starting off to give notice to the salvage people? He might have been sickening with it then. And if he had the disease very badly it may have caused his hair to turn grey."

"Quite true. But all the same I did not believe that

the man was Douglas Amoyne, and so I told the truth about it," replied Marion, who was keeping her temper under control because of the suffering on Gertrude's face. It always bothered her when Gertrude looked like that; so, although she fairly longed to tell Jessica just what she thought of her, in the most vigorous English of which she was capable, Marion held herself in with a tight hand, which was greatly to her credit.

"It is just like a conspiracy to keep us poor!" stormed Jessica, and she beat her fists upon the table in her impotent grieving. "You and Gertrude rather enjoy being poor than otherwise, and you do not have such a bad time of it either; for, of course, Gertrude does just as she likes at the factory, and because she is making it pay everybody is nice to her; and you do as you like at home, so you don't have a bad time either. But if you had my life you would soon see that poverty is not as pretty as it is painted. See how I slave and slave to bring in that wretched two dollars a week, and all my youth is going in the strain. I feel an old woman almost when I go to bed at night, and when Delia wakes me in the mornings I can hardly drag myself out of bed. Then to think that we might be living beautiful easy lives again if only you and Gertrude had chosen to say that the man was Douglas! Oh, it is cruel!"

"But we could not tell a lie!" exclaimed Gertrude in a shocked tone.

"Did anyone want you to tell a lie?" Jessica fairly shouted the words. "I suppose you could have left it a doubt if you had not really recognized the man. You might have said that identification was not easy after the body had been so long in the water, and then the fact would have been accepted. And, Gertrude, you are always talking about Divine Providence overruling our lives, and can you believe that Divine Providence would have sent

the body of the poor man here if there had not been something behind it?"

Gertrude shook her head. Although Jessica was the youngest of the four, in some respects she was the cleverest, and she seemed to develop every day. In a mood like this it was of no use to argue with her, and indeed Gertrude knew herself not equal to the task. She could only drop back on the fundamentals, as it were, and stick solidly to the unmistakable right and wrong of the thing. "I said what I believed to be true, and I could say no other. The years may clear up these happenings, or they may always remain a mystery."

"Of course it will always be a mystery now, and we shall always be poor, while the lawyers and that sort of people will get rich on the money which ought to be ours," said Jessica in what she fondly believed to be a tone of patient resignation, but that was in reality a complaining whine.

"You are very disagreeable!" burst out Marion. But Gertrude stopped her with an uplifted hand.

"Don't be hard on the child; she is just tired out, and when one is like that things are apt to be dun-coloured."

"Yes, that is just what I am—tired out!" cried Jessica, catching up Gertrude's words, and feeling soothed and comforted by them. "There is no one understands me as you do, Gertrude, and you never scold me when I am cross, and I know that I am very cross indeed to-night."

"I will call and see Mrs. Lorimer to-morrow morning," said Gertrude, "and tell her that you can't take care of those babies any longer. It is plainly too much for you. And now I think that you had better go to bed again, and indeed we shall all be glad to go early to-night, seeing what a dreadful time we had last night. She quietly insisted on Jessica going to bed at once, although, having

relieved her feelings by the outburst, Jessica was feeling so much better that she would really have enjoyed sitting up until the others went to bed also.

Delia was late home, for the babies, having slept so much in the morning, were extra lively when bedtime came, and Delia declared herself quite exhausted with the effort of hushing them to sleep.

"Just as fast as I managed to soothe one off to sleep another would rouse up and yell; then the whole performance had to be gone over again, and all the thanks I got from Mrs. Lorimer was to hear her say I was plainly not used to babies, for I seemed to have no tact in managing them—the imps!" Delia dropped back on a chair, fanning herself as if the effort had left her perspiring.

"Make haste to bed now," said Gertrude, "for we must be up at dawn to-morrow. Think of what we have to do at the factory." They hurried over the things which had to be done, and were getting to bed before the red light of the sunset had ceased to stain the surface of the sea with crimson and gold.

"Did you tell Mrs. Lorimer that Jessica would not be fit to go over in the morning?" Gertrude asked Delia as she said good-night.

"Yes; and she said how sorry she was, for Jessica had a way with her where children were concerned, and that she did not think I was a patch on my younger sister." Delia yawned widely, then lay down on her little camp-bed and was at once asleep.

Tired though she was, sleep did not come so easily to Gertrude. The reproaches of Jessica, unreasonable though they were, had a sting with them which rankled in a distressing fashion. The worst of it was that Gertrude blamed herself so bitterly for letting Jessica overwork herself to the extent of making such a frame of mind possible, and did not for a moment realize that it was the

overstrain of yesterday's disaster in the storm which made the trouble.

It was past midnight before she forgot her worries in slumber, and hence her night's rest was a cruelly short one, for they were stirring by half-past four o'clock the next morning. Breakfast was eaten soon after five, and then she, with Delia, set off for the factory in the wagon, while Marion went out to milk the cows, which now numbered three.

Never in one day had there been so much cream brought to the factory, and it was nearly six o'clock at night before they had finished turning it into butter, and set it away to harden in readiness for packing for market next day.

The two left the factory together, but a mile along the trail Gertrude got out of the wagon to walk over to the Lorimer homestead, while Delia drove on home.

It was rather uncomfortable to be obliged to pay visits in one's working clothes, but it would have taken too long to go home and change. Moreover, it was not likely that Mrs. Lorimer would be in anything but working garb, so that it really did not matter except from the standpoint of personal comfort.

Her ears were assailed by much wailing in varying keys before she reached the house, and she smiled faintly, thinking how very difficult Delia must have found the task of coping with such a family all at once. She quickened her steps, for she saw Mrs. Lorimer come to the door of the house, looking out as if she were expecting someone.

"Why, Miss Amoyne, is it you? I thought that it was Delia when I saw someone coming in at the field gate. How very kind of you to come over, for I never felt as I wanted someone to talk to more in my life." Mrs. Lorimer backed into the house as she spoke, and subsided into a rocking-chair, motioning Gertrude to another.

But as three of the children were apparently trying to

see which could cry the loudest, Gertrude tried her hand at quieting matters down before taking the proffered chair.

"Don't worry about the babies, Miss Amoyne; they have all been fed, and they have no pins sticking into them that I know of, so I guess they are merely making a noise by way of stretching their lungs. I always hold that it does children a powerful lot of good to cry a little, and I ought to know what suits them."

"I should think so too," laughed Gertrude. She gave up the attempt to bring peace among the brawlers, and sat down to give Mrs. Lorimer a chance to talk.

"Such news we have had, Miss Amoyne! I don't feel to have any breath left; and if you had not come along for me to talk to I think that I should have had to talk to the cows, for talk I must."

"I am quite ready to listen, and I hope that it is good news," replied Gertrude, wondering what it could be that had the power to transform the faded Mrs. Lorimer and to make her positively young and blooming.

Mrs. Lorimer suddenly tried to draw down the corners of her mouth and to make herself look sad and sorrowful. "Well, of course, you can't call it good news when there is death in the family. It is my husband's brother that has died so suddenly. But in this case there are compensations, for he was not at all friendly with his people, and he has been downright horrid to my husband; but he has made a pile of money, and it will all come to Mr. Lorimer.

"How very good that will be for you, because you have to work so hard now with so many babies to take care of!" said Gertrude in kindly sympathy.

"Ah, indeed it will be good!" Mrs. Lorimer drew a long breath of relief. "No one knows how hard a mother's life is except the mother herself. There have been times in plenty when I would have thankfully laid down and

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died if it had not been for the children. But a mother does not dare to die all the time that she can keep her hold on life, for no one is going to take so much care of little ones as their own mother—that is only reasonable.”

“Where did your husband’s brother live—in the States?” asked Gertrude, for the Lorimers were Americans, and had only left their country to improve their circumstances.

“No, he emigrated from the old place before we did but, having no family, he could go farther and do better.; He went right up to the country wide of Fort George, hit the hike, as they say in the backwoods, and bought a lot of land at something like half a dollar per acre. He held to it for a year, then the town planners came along and bought him out at twenty dollars an acre, which wasn’t bad, you will say. He wrote to my husband about it, and bragged pretty considerable as to what a man could do when he wasn’t encumbered with a wife and children. A few months ago he doubled his capital again by some fortunate speculation. But now he is dead; died suddenly sitting in his shack, so the lawyer wrote, and the whole pile he has left comes to my husband.”

“I am very glad for you,” murmured Gertrude, who saw that this was certainly no case for condolence.

“It means a lot, I can tell you. I mean to live in the city and have a nice time. I shan’t do much except sit round in easy-chairs at first, till the tiredness has worn off a bit. But I will take jolly good care of one thing, and that is, that my husband invests his money in safe things and leaves it there. Some men have a genius for making money and some haven’t, and it is best to let well alone. I would rather have a little and keep it, than make a lot and have it all go. By the way, I should like to take Jessica away with me when we go. I can trust the babies

with her, and I should feel quite easy in my mind at nights if she were in charge of the nursery."

"You are very kind to say so," murmured Gertrude; "but I am afraid that you must not count on Jessica. I came round this way to-day to tell you that we do not think she ought to do anything for a few weeks. I am so glad that your altered circumstances will make it possible for you to have effectual help with the children, then you will not miss Jessica so much."

"But I want her because she is so trustworthy, and it can't be very hard just playing round with the little things. Of course I will have help to keep them clean and cook their food. I only want Jessica to boss the nursery." Mrs. Lorimer, sitting up, looked quite indignant at the thought that perhaps she was not going to have it all her own way.

"Jessica is too young to take responsibility," replied Gertrude, shaking her head with a very decided air. "Indeed I think that it is worse than hard work, because it strains mind and body too, and she must not be made old before her time."

"Now, that is nonsense!" cried Mrs. Lorimer, and the pink in her cheeks deepened to an angry red. "People who have their living to earn cannot always be picking and choosing their jobs. If Jessica comes back to me I shall most likely make her a little present for the way in which she took care of the babies when the cart broke down, although, of course, it is our duty always to do our very best; and I shall also increase her salary."

"You are very kind," said Gertrude coldly. "But Marion and I have quite decided that Jessica is not to work for a while."

"The question is, can you afford to keep her without work?" The sneer in Mrs. Lorimer's tone was so pronounced that Gertrude must have been deaf indeed if she

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had not noticed it; but she wisely chose to ignore it, only saying, as she rose to go:

"Oh yes! I think that there will be no difficulty about that. Ours is not an expensive household to keep up, and there are so many things that we can go without if only we sit down and think out what are necessary and what are merely pleasant."

"You would have done better to have declared that dead man to be your cousin. Then you could have had your uncle's money again; and, seeing that you could not be sure either way, it would have been far better to have taken the risk of it being a mistake and said that you believed he was your kin. You are not a very good business woman to have had a chance like that—the body being found on the shore—and then to get nothing from it." Mrs. Lorimer spoke in a patronizing tone. She was reminding herself that she was a person of means, and that Miss Amoyne was merely a girl who had to work for a living, and she gave herself airs accordingly.

Gertrude smiled a little bitterly as she walked home in the April twilight. Most people were calling her short-sighted and unbusinesslike in not declaring that nameless dead man to be her cousin Douglas. But, having been led into wrongdoing once, on account of that money of her late uncle's, she was feeling that she would rather be poor all her life than transgress in the same fashion again. How many there were who blamed her—Wilberforce Washington, Victor Green, Mrs. Lorimer, and Jessica.

Ah, that was where lay the sting, that Jessica should blame her and heap bitter reproaches on her head, just because she would not sully her soul with a lie!

"I have no conviction that it was Douglas, and if God had meant me to know, He would surely have made it plain to me," she said to herself. She wiped away a few scalding tears, and went on her way schooling herself to wear

a bright face and a cheerful mien when she got home, for surely there was nothing so hard to live with as a dismal person.

Marion was at work in the garden, and Jessica was languidly knitting, sitting on the bench which stood outside the door. But Delia was not at home, for she had taken Bruno and had gone down to the shore in search of clams for supper.

Gertrude also went to work in the garden, and while she plied her hoe she told the others of the riches that had come to Mrs. Lorimer.

"Did she say that she was going to give me anything in reward for my troubles when the wheel came off?" asked Jessica languidly.

"She said that she might make you a little present if you came back to her," answered Gertrude; "but I told her that Marion and I had decided it was best for you to do no work for a while, and so she would have to find other help in her nursery."

"It is simply lovely to think that my ears have not to be assailed by crying babies, and that my arms are not to ache with carrying the poor creatures about!" sighed Jessica, and she asked suddenly: "But how can you do without my money?"

"Oh, we shall do very well, dear! You must not worry about that. Delia and I are earning more now, and indeed I hope that in a few weeks the factory will be a paying concern. Then we are going to sell the calf next week, and that will wipe out the bill at the stores and leave quite a lot over. We shall not be able to have any new clothes this summer, but that will not really matter."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Hay Bee

THE WELCOME HOME was a quarter-section of Government land which had been pre-empted by old Anthony Bream about ten years before his tragic end. But he had only cleared as much of it as the law compelled him to do, and the rest remained covered with scrub, of little value for anything except fence rails or firewood. A small portion of the cleared land was used for growing corn and potatoes, and the rest was pasture, and very good pasture, lying in a sheltered corner of the hills, well open to the moisture-laden winds from the sea.

But with three cows to feed, and a couple of calves also, the pasture land could not be laid in for hay, after English methods of farming, and so the four girls had a family council as to where the hay for the cattle in the coming winter was to be secured.

When there had been a good many abandoned farms in the neighbourhood the popular way of going to work was to drive a mower over the pastures of the abandoned land, and so gather a crop for the winter's requirements, and, this method serving to keep the pasture in good repair, no one had any objection to the plan.

Since the opening of the butter factory, however, farming was looking up in the neighbourhood, and so many farms had been taken up that there was not enough abandoned land to go round, so far as hay crops were concerned.

But there was waste land in plenty — wide stretches of

grass on the salt marshes out beyond Spit Head, acres and acres of dune land, where purple loosestrife, wild mint and parsley, crowded each other among succulent grasses, and it was here that the winter's hay was to come from.

One day, when she was through with the work at the factory, Gertrude left Delia to the task of clearing up, while she, armed with her tin specimen case, went for a long tramp by the shore for the purpose of botanizing and also of choosing a place where the grass could be easily cut and made into hay.

The ground near to The Welcome Home was so very rough that it could only be cut with a scythe or a sickle, and neither of these methods appealed to the enterprising farmers of The Welcome Home, especially as Wilberforce Washington had lately purchased a mower and haymaker, which he was willing to loan for a consideration in dollars.

"It must be the machine, that is certain," said Marion when the hay question was being discussed; "for you cannot leave the factory long enough to cut grass, even if mowing were suitable work for a woman, and I cannot leave the farm; why, it is shouting for me every hour in the day." Gertrude, who knew the shore and the marshes so much better than any of the others, at once volunteered to go and choose a suitable spot for operations.

"What will you do—stack it there or bring it home?" asked Delia, who was not disposed to be left out of any discussion on ways and means in which her elders might be engaged.

"Stacking it there would be the easiest thing," replied Marion, "and we could cart it home in winter, or even bring it on sleighs when there is enough snow for that sort of transit. But there are drawbacks to that, for of course a hayrick on no-man's-land is apt to be no man's property, and it would not be soothing to our feelings to go after our haystack in bitter winter weather to find that it had

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vanished before we got there. It will plainly be wiser to bring it home; only, however it is to be managed is more than I can imagine, for think of the task of carting it three, perhaps four, miles, and we have only one horse for the business!"

"Why not have a bee? It would be glorious fun, and if we got ten or a dozen wagons, just think how the business would hum!" and Delia clapped her hands with glee at the prospect.

"A bee will be the very thing. Just remember how the shingles went on our roof, and everyone said what a jolly time they had had. My only fear is, whether at this busy time of the year enough people would be willing to spare horses, wagons, and time to help us." Marion's forehead showed a crease of care as she spoke, for the hay question was weighing rather heavily on her just now.

"Shall I go round and canvass the district?" asked Jessica.

"No; I will ask the people when they bring their cream to-day whether they would be willing to come with horses and wagons to carry our hay home from the marshes when we have it cut and ready; then we shall know where we stand," answered Gertrude, and, that meeting with entire approval, the council was for the time at an end.

Everyone to whom Gertrude spoke promised cordial support, provided the hay were cut and made fit for ricking, and, having succeeded so far, Gertrude next went out to choose a suitable place for operations.

She had been at the factory since dawn, and, as dawn comes very early indeed in late June, it is easy to understand that her first freshness and zest of work had somewhat worn away.

But the walk was pure pleasure, and the botanizing was pure pleasure also. It was so rarely that she could spare time to go out in this fashion; for when the factory had had

as much of her as it needed, and the home claims had been attended to, there was still her duty to her neighbour, which in this region of self-help was certainly no sinecure. To-day, however, she was free, for it was duty that was sending her forth to roam at will over the waste places, which just now were beautiful with blossom and seed.

The day was at its hottest, but the heat was tempered by a cool wind from the sea, and she had a wide flapping hat, which served to shade her eyes.

On and on and on she tramped, thinking of the old days in camp, when there was nothing to do but to take her own pleasure or the pleasure of her sisters. But she would not have had those days back if she could. Of course it would be pleasant to have more time for reading and for culture generally, but one could not have everything, and when the winter came again the work would naturally slacken off a little, and then she would be able to satisfy her book-hunger to a certain extent. Meanwhile she had this beautiful day for wandering, and she was minded to make the most of her privilege.

The trouble was that so much of the ground had big sandstone boulders scattered here and there, and it would never do to risk W. W.'s brand-new mower on land of that sort; so she had to plod on and on, until she was nearly five miles from home, and far beyond Spit Head.

Here she found just what she was looking for: a wide stretch of flat land with the grass almost knee high. Naturally it was coarse and wiry, but it would have all the valuable properties of hay from salt marshes, and she was getting to be a very fair judge of good cattle feed—her work among the different lots of cream having proved a valuable education on the subject of feeding the cows which produced it.

"That is the place where our grass must be cut!" she exclaimed, then gave an ejaculation of disgust, for not

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more than a mile away she could plainly see the roof and chimney of a little shack.

"Someone lives here, so I must go and see if the grass may be taken, or if the individual yonder has prior rights," she said, talking aloud in her deep disappointment and vexation.

It was a weary mile, one of the longest that she had ever tramped, for the feeling that she was going to be disappointed made her suddenly realize how very tired she was, and then she remembered that it was a hard day's work she had performed at the factory before ever she set out on the long stroll in search of material for a hayrick.

"Deserted!" she exclaimed, when at last she stood quite close to the place. Then a cold shiver shook her, and she actually trembled with fear, for she was thinking of that other day when she took a walk and stumbled on the collapsed tent of the young man who had helped them.

"How silly I am!" she cried in a disgusted tone, and, gathering up her courage, she walked up to the closed door of the shack and gently tried it. It was easy to see that it was deserted, for the grass was growing close to the threshold, even sprouting vigorously in the decaying wooden sill of the door.

She opened the door, and then stood for a few moments with her back turned to it, so that the foul air might have a chance to escape. By the odours of the inside she imagined that it must have been weeks since anyone had been there, perhaps months.

Presently she ventured inside, first taking a comprehensive glance round, to make quite certain that there was nothing to be afraid of, and then settling down to a closer scrutiny which might give her some clue to the reason of the place having been abandoned.

Abandoned it was, without any doubt, for a meal of a

sort stood on the little table under the window, and a lamp was there; but the kerosene in it had all been burned out, and the wick, which was white with dust, had been so charred that she could only think it must have burned itself out.

The food on the table was covered with dust also, and she supposed by the look of the dust it was accounted for by the fierce winds driving the sand in showers before it. Everything was covered with dust, and everything looked as if it had just been left in the expectation of the owner coming in to finish his meal.

But who could the owner have been? Gertrude supposed that she knew most of the people of the neighbourhood, and she was frankly puzzled to find that someone had lived here fairly recently, someone whom she had not known, of the existence of whose house she had not been aware.

It was just a one-roomed shack, with a rough bedframe along one wall, a very rusty stove, in which were the remains of a fire that was long since cold. Some clothes hung from a peg at the head of the bed, but a search through the pockets revealed nothing that could be regarded as a clue to the owner's identity, and Gertrude was turning away, very much mystified, when something under the bedframe caught her attention, and she saw that it was a much-damaged bicycle wheel.

"A bicycle in a place like this! How very strange!" she exclaimed. Suddenly a cold shiver ran down her back. She was thinking of that young man, who said that he should go across to his tent and get his bicycle to ride along the sands to warn the salvage people about the derelict schooner. What had happened to that young man and his bicycle after he had ridden away disappointed, when the salvage people told him he was not first in the field?

Ah, what?

"I must find out if he came here!" she cried, and there was a sob in her voice, for she was beginning to fear that some harm had come to this man, who, through being alive, had robbed her of a competency, and forced her to work hard for a living.

In that moment she realized, more keenly than she had ever done before, what a blow it would be to her to hear that he was dead. She had only seen him for such a little while, and yet he had been so truly kind that it was dreadful to think he might have come by some sad and painful end.

Very carefully she searched the place, even going through the pockets of those very fusty garments a second time, in order to see if there was any clue at all to who might have lived there. She found money in some of the pockets, not a large sum, yet amounting, all told, to several dollars, quite enough to tempt the cupidity of any person who was poor that might have happened along and struck this lone shack by the sea, and then she remembered that the door had not even been fastened, only latched.

But there was nothing to give her a clue to what she wanted to know so badly, and, finally giving up her search, she shut the door, and even tied it with a blue ribbon which she wore in a bow at her collar, for she was remembering that there was unclaimed money in that shack, and she would have to report her find to the police.

She wondered why she had not known of the existence of that little house before, then remembered that she had never been quite so far in that direction previously, and the shack was so tucked in under the lee of the hill that it was not easy to see it very far away from the seaward or coast side. In her search for a suitable hayfield she had approached from the landward side, and in that direction it was visible for a considerable distance.

It was supper-time before she got home. The chores

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were all done, and the other girls were taking their ease in various directions. Even Marion was sitting in a hammock chair, busy with sewing; a rather rare thing for her in pleasant weather like this, for she was wont to say that a needle in fine weather was a tool that she loathed.

"Have you found our hayfield?" she demanded, jumping up from her chair, so that Gertrude might sit in it, for it happened to be the most comfortable one they possessed, and was surely the right of the sister who had tramped so far that day in quest of material for the hayrick.

"Yes, I have found it; enough grass for ten ricks, I should say, only I do not think that we shall need as much as that," she answered, with a rather languid smile.

"I am afraid that our bee would not buzz to that extent," replied Marion, with a twinkle in her eye. "It is a good thing that you have found it, though, for I should have been in a rather awkward fix if you had not. W. W. was over here this afternoon, and I engaged the mower and the scattering machine for to-morrow and the next day. After that they are booked for two weeks straight off; so it seemed that we must have it at once or go without indefinitely."

"It is a good thing that you did settle to have it. But what about horses?" Gertrude's tone was a little anxious; their lack of horses was the weak point in their farming equipment. They had only the one, which took them to the factory and brought them back, did what carting was necessary, and was useful in a hundred ways; but it was only one horse, and it would not be powerful enough to draw the mower, she feared.

"Oh, W. W. says that he will send his own horses, and that we had better have Victor too, because he understands the machine, and can set it right if it goes wrong," explained Marion. "Victor will have two horses hitched

to the mower, and he will boss that lot, while I shall have one horse for the scatterer and follow on behind. It will be like a day's holiday for me, because he says that there is a seat on the scatterer, so I can ride round all day."

"Quite fed up with luxury you will be. And when Delia and I come home from the factory we shall have to suffer a great many things at your hands because of the intolerance bred of your swanking round on hay scatterers," laughed Gertrude.

"I wanted Marion to say that I might take her place when we had finished at the factory, but she says that Victor is getting too impressive in his attentions to me, and so it would not do!" groaned Delia.

Gertrude looked up in quick alarm, but Marion only laughed in her easy way.

"There is nothing to trouble about yet, and Victor is really a good sort, and will make a fine man, if he ever grows big enough. But Mrs. Paterson said the other day that he told her he thought of marrying the third Miss Amoyne just as soon as he had saved enough money to stock a farm, and so I thought I had better play propriety and drive the scatterer myself."

"I really think so too!" cried Gertrude, with a laugh. "But you are not very middle-aged yet."

"It is a fault that is mending with time," answered Marion. "Anyhow, I am years older than Victor, and, besides, I am the second Miss Amoyne, and not the third, and so it does not matter."

They all laughed merrily over the matrimonial aspirations of Victor Green, and the supper that night was quite a lively meal.

But when it was over, and Gertrude got Marion by herself for a little time, she told her of that deserted hut away in the salt marshes, where the lamp had burned itself dry,

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and the food stood on the table, while, more wonderful still, there was money in the pockets of the garments which hung on the wall.

"It looks as if the person who lived there had gone out hurriedly, forgetting to come back, or else was unable to do so, and I think that I shall have to warn the police. Plainly no one has entered the place for weeks." Gertrude's face went very grave as she spoke, and the gravity was reflected on that of Marion.

"You are right; it does look queer. I had no idea that the coast in that direction was inhabited at all. I have never been farther than Spit Head; that was quite enough for me. I have not the love of adventure that the rest of you seem to possess;" and Marion shivered, for the country beyond Spit Head had struck her as looking very dreary indeed.

"There was something else in the shack that I noticed, and that was a very-much-battered bicycle. Perhaps it would be safer to call it the remains of a bicycle, for really it was only the wheels that were intact. It was a very old make; the sort they call bone-shakers."

"The bicycle that Douglas had?" cried Marion, her fears leaping at once in the same direction as Gertrude's.

"I don't know; that has got to be proved. First of all we must find out who lived at the shack, and why he went away in such a hurry. Of course, a hundred people might have bicycles of that pattern more or less past repair, but the coincidence struck me as peculiar, and I wondered——"

"Do you mean you are afraid someone did harm to Douglas?" asked Marion, with a kindling horror in her face.

"No, no; for who would harm a poor man?" said Gertrude hastily. "I was meaning that I wondered if the bicycle had been stolen from the tent. It is mysterious all round, and very soon I shall be afraid to go near the

shore; for, if you notice, it is I who always stumble on the mysteries, and it is so very uncomfortable."

"Never mind. Let us get off to bed. To-morrow everything will look different, and you will forget all about the shore being weird when we have had the hay bee to brighten things up a little. I am going to plan the bill of fare while I ride round on the scatterer, and then it will be quite easy to get the things ready."

"What day shall we have the bee, that is, always providing people will come to help us?"

"They will come fast enough, because we treat them well, and because we do our part in helping other people. Let me see: to-day is Tuesday—oh! Saturday will do beautifully, for either Delia or I will keep the grass well turned, and Mr. Lorimer used to say that it was better not to let hay make too much. I learned a lot more farming from him than I am ever likely to learn from Mr. Bryant."

"All the same, Mr. Bryant knows a good deal of one sort and another," said Gertrude, and then, having had the satisfaction of the last word, she bade Marion an affectionate good-night, and went to bed.

They were up at dawn again, for the factory work was very heavy now, and sometimes Jessica came along to help with the weighing and moulding. Gertrude meant to buy an automatic weigher next season, but for this year it was wiser not to venture on any outlay that could be avoided, so Jessica was pressed into service.

Jessica was permanently at home now. The Lorimers had left the neighbourhood, having sold their farm, with its stock, and crops, and even the household furniture, to an Englishman, who had previously been living in the neighbourhood of Winnipeg.

This man, Mr. Bryant, had proved to be the brother of an old-time rector of Templeton, which had been the early home of the Amoyne girls. They would have liked

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to be very friendly with the new neighbours, but Mrs. Bryant was a reserved little woman, cold, and rather unsympathetic, so the friendship did not progress very fast.

There was one son—"Our Tom", so his father spoke of him—but he was away from home, and his mother so rarely mentioned him that Gertrude used to wonder sometimes whether she really cared for her only child or whether it was merely her peculiarity.

Marion spent the day riding round on the scatterer, and came home in the evening declaring that she had had a most restful holiday. The mower had cut as much hay as they would be able to make that week, and so it was not coming again on the next day, but the scatterer and also the horse that drew it were to remain at The Welcome Home until the rick was built, as the machine that scattered, by a reversal of the machinery, raked the hay together, and was a very valuable adjunct to the hay harvest.

On Friday, when Delia came home from the factory, she was sent off with the scatterer, and the other three set to work to provide a tempting feed for the busy workers who were expected next day to help with gathering in the hay.

As the rick was to be built at home, there would not be the bother of carrying provisions to the place where the hay was being made. So the one sitting-room was turned for the time into a sort of buffet, and the workers could come in to feed in relays.

As milk and eggs were more easy to come by than most things, the provisions consisted largely of custards and cakes, with savoury omelettes and toothsome things of that sort, while flat buckwheat cakes cut open and buttered were among the more solid things provided. One big ham had been boiled, and cut into delicate

slices, which were laid between thin cakes of special make, that form of sandwich being easy to cut and easy to eat, two things which mattered a great deal when work was so pressing. For drink there was tea and coffee in unlimited quantities, and lemonade of home manufacture, with a local beverage which found great favour in times of very hard work in summertime; it was made of scalded oatmeal, lemons, and sugar, and rejoiced in the name of sizzle.

Saturday morning dawned with a cloudless sky and a drying wind: just perfect weather for haymaking as everyone agreed.

Gertrude and Delia had gone over to the factory for about four hours, but they were home again long before the dew had all dried from the grass. The four sisters in light cotton frocks were whisking to and fro, putting the last touches to their preparations, when the first wagon drove in at the orchard gate, with the workers; and after that wagons arrived in quick succession, for everyone whom Gertrude had asked had promised to come, all of them turning up to time, except Mr. Bryant, and he sent his hired man, Bill, with a pair of horses and a wagon, which did just as well, or perhaps even better, for Bill was strong and used to hard work. He was one of those people who always work best in company, and the amount he got through that day was simply amazing to anyone who only saw him crawling round in the ordinary way.

Two fat Germans turned up from the farm on the other side of Mr. Bryant's place, and they also worked with a will. One of them had mastered a little English, which he used in season and out; it was only "What a fine day!" but he said it so often and so persistently that he might have been the greatest humorist in the world from the shouts of laughter his sally produced. Altogether it was

a very merry company which turned the heads of their horses towards the wide stretches of salt marsh beyond Spit Head, even the horses seeming to catch the infection of fun and jollity from the way in which they shook their heads and pranced along with the empty wagons.

Victor Green had gone forward an hour earlier with the scatterer, and, using the machine as a rake, had got a lot of the hay drawn into swathes in readiness for loading.

None of the girls were in the field to-day, as there was so much for them to do at home, and they welcomed Mrs. M'Whortle with positive rapture when she drove up with her husband, for they had not expected any help indoors, and the sight of her capable figure added the last touch to their satisfaction.

The day was not to be so untroubled as it began, however, for the men and wagons had not started for the marshes more than an hour when one of the mounted police rode up to the orchard gate, and, dismounting, came to the house in search of Gertrude. She had sent word to the police of her find in the deserted hut, and one of the men had come over to interview her, and to inspect the hut for himself.

He was a young man, new to the neighbourhood, and so he could only listen to what she had to tell him, without being able to help her out in the way of suggestion.

He did not even know where the marshes lay, and in the end they had to requisition the wagon of Dick Donovan, who was getting the rick bottom laid, and then Gertrude drove the officer down to the shore and away to the marshes where the haymakers were at work loading the wagons.

"What a long way to bring the stuff! Why did you not cut it nearer home?" asked the young man, who had been a public schoolboy in England, and should have been at

Oxford or Cambridge by this time if it had not been for the call of the west and the longing that was in him for the unfrequented ways.

"We could have got it nearer, but we could not cut it with the mower, and so it seemed worth while to go farther," Gertrude answered. "You see, this ground is all strewn with boulders, and although it would be all right for a scythe it would never do to risk a machine here. But the marshes out beyond Spit Head have not a stone on them bigger than a pebble. There they are, all that flat land out beyond the rocks."

"What a place!" he exclaimed, and truly it was a marvellous bit of coast. In one mile the sea ran in upon a barrier of jagged rocks and big boulders, and in the next mile the coast line dropped to a flat plain which appeared to stretch to the edge of the horizon, and was covered just now with the finest hay crop any farmer could wish to see, but which would certainly go to waste, because it was so far from anyone who could use it in a fashion sufficiently profitable to make it worth the carting back to civilization.

"You might exclaim what a place if you saw it in winter," said Gertrude, with a laugh. "It is mostly under water then, save for little ridges here and there, and it is one of the most mournful spots I have seen. But in spring and summer it is charming; there is such a sweep of it, and then there are so many flowers."

"Ah, you are a botanist!" and he nodded, well pleased at his own shrewdness in having discovered so much. Then, meeting the first loaded wagon on its way back to The Welcome Home, he stopped to interview the driver as to whether the man knew anything concerning the owner of the little shack away on the other side of the marshes.

This individual did not even know that there was a

shack in this direction; so they passed him and went on to the next wagon, which was just having the last forkfuls added to its load. There were several men here, and they instantly gathered round to discover what was wanted of them; but no one seemed to know anything about a house in this direction, until at length Victor Green, who had seen the group from afar, left his raking to know what all the commotion was about.

"Would it be that deaf fellow who used to tramp over to our store about once a month, I wonder?" he said reflectively. "He has not been for a long time now, and I had about forgotten him. Deaf as a post he was, and we could never discover where he came from; but I remember someone telling me that they had seen him mooning along the shore. What did he do for a living do you expect? Or would he be living on his means?"

"I can't say. What build of man was he?" The officer's voice rang out sharply now, so that Victor looked at him in surprise, wondering what he had said to offend the fellow, for how was he to know that this was a way the man of the police had when he thought that he had stumbled on a clue.

"About the ordinary sort. I mean he was not big enough to hit you in the eye, nor so small that you had to look twice to see if he was there." Victor's manner was distinctly impertinent now, for he did not choose to be spoken to as if he were dirt, so he said to himself; but the man never noticed it, only stood lost in thought and nodding his head in an absorbed fashion.

"Do you expect that it might have been this deaf man whose corpse was found on the shore back in April?" he asked suddenly, wheeling round upon Gertrude, who was watching him carefully.

"It might be," she admitted, with a start, and then her face went very white, for she was thinking of the battered

remains of the bicycle which lay thrust under the bed-frame in the deserted hut, and she was wondering if that body might indeed have been that of Douglas Amoyne, despite the pronouncement of Marion regarding the grey hair and the pock mark.

"Had this deaf man of whom you speak a pock mark on his face," she asked Victor; but that astute young man had to confess, with much secret humiliation, that he had not noticed.

"We will go on and look over the hut, then we can draw our deductions later," said the officer rather brusquely. Then Gertrude drove on again, taking a straight course across the wide stretch of grass land, which brought her in due course to the shack.

"What a place to live in!" exclaimed the officer, with a positive groan. He got out of the wagon, and, leaving Gertrude out in the sunshine, plunged into the dismal little place to look round for himself.

"I have found exactly fifteen dollars in the pockets of the man's clothes, and this," he said, holding up the tattered remains of a book for her to see.

Again Gertrude went rather white, for it seemed to her that she knew by instinct what she was going to see, and her fingers trembled as she took the book and turned it over.

It was a well-bound copy of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and the name written in pale ink on the fly-leaf was—Douglas Amoyne.

"This might so easily have been filched from the things left in the deserted camp," she explained to the officer, who was watching her curiously and wondering at the fear in her eyes. "I cannot bring myself to believe that my cousin is dead. Did you see the remains of the bicycle under the bed?"

"Yes, I believe that I have seen everything there is to

see," he answered, with a laugh, "even to the blue ribbon which you had tied on the door as a sort of sealing up of the shack and its contents." Wrapping the money up in a little packet and putting the book with it, to be taken care of at headquarters, he got up into the wagon once more, and they turned back by the way that they had come.

"Judging from circumstantial evidence I should say that the corpse those prospectors found on the shore was that of the man who lived in the shack back yonder," said the officer, emerging presently from a brown study which had lasted so long that Gertrude wondered if he had gone to sleep.

"So I think," she replied briefly, adding, with an effort: "But there was nothing to show that he was Douglas Amoyne?"

"No, there is nothing to prove it, indeed I should say that the chances are all in favour of its not being Douglas Amoyne. But this one thing I believe, and that is, if we could have found this man in life he could have told us what has become of your cousin. It was your cousin, wasn't it?"

Gertrude nodded. She could not tell this stranger that, in spite of what she stood to gain by her cousin's death, what she wanted most to know was that he was still alive, and why he had never come back to say thank you for their trouble in taking care of the stranded schooner for him.

"It is a mystery which might have been easy enough for Sherlock Holmes and gentlemen of that ilk to unravel, but I will confess that it is beyond me," said the officer at length. "I am very much obliged to you, Miss Amoyne, for the help which you have given us, and if anything further turns up I will see that you are made aware of it."

"Thank you!" she answered a trifle drearily. The

happy busy summer day grew suddenly overcast for her, while it seemed to her youthful impatience that she could never endure to go on year after year in this purposeless waiting for the tidings which never came. But she had herself well in hand, and by the time they drove in at the orchard gate she was her serene and smiling self again. Your true woman never wears her heart where outsiders can look at it, and one does not know what lies behind the smiles of even the happiest looking of the daughters of Eve.

So much hay had been cut and made that it was soon clear there would be two ricks instead of one, and the workers knew that if it was all to be carried by nightfall they would have to work their very hardest.

The first rick was topped up, and the second was half-way up. Marion and Gertrude, leaving Mrs. M'Whortle and the two younger girls to wrestle with the refreshment problem, were out by the ricks, helping to unload the wagons as they came in from the marshes, when Mr. Bryant hurried in at the orchard gate.

He was hatless in spite of the glare of the sun, and his grey hair was tossed wildly in all directions; his face was streaming with perspiration, and he looked in the deepest affliction.

"It is Mrs. Bryant—she is ill, and I want Bill to drive for the doctor!" he panted, then had to lean against the fence and gasp, by which it was easy to see that he had been running.

Bill was away across the marshes with his wagon, but there were volunteers in plenty for the work, and in less than ten minutes the freshest horse had been chosen and the messenger drove out through the orchard gate and took the trail to Poplar Ridge.

"Go into the house and sit down for a quarter of an hour, Mr. Bryant," said Gertrude. "I am going over to

look after Mrs. Bryant." She had spoken a quiet word to Marion, who had answered with a nod of perfect agreement, and then she was ready to start.

"I am all right, and I could not think of taking you away from this," he said, with a swing of his hand towards the busy scene, for another wagon had just come in, and the workers fell upon it like a swarm of ants.

"There are plenty to do the work, and I can easily be spared for the greatest need," she answered quietly, and when he had seen her start he was quite willing to let Delia draw him into the house and put him into an easy-chair for a brief rest. He was so exhausted with that run across the pastures that it was a case of not being able to face the walk back just yet.

Gertrude was tired, as well she might be, seeing how long and hard the day had been. But sitting still when she drove across the marshes with the police-officer had been a rest for her; so she told herself that it might easily have been worse.

She wondered greatly what was the matter with Mrs. Bryant, for the distracted husband had only said that the doctor must be sent for with all haste, and, seeing how exhausted he was, she had not liked to ask him too many questions.

It seemed dreadful to think that a sick woman in need of urgent medical help should be left for so long a time as it took Mr. Bryant to come to The Welcome Home and for Gertrude to get across the pastures to his house. The thought of it quickened her pace almost to a run.

A dog on guard by the house rose up and growled at her, which made her catch her breath in a moment of panic lest the creature should not understand enough to let her past. But when she called it by name the animal got up and wagged a friendly tail, which was invitation enough for her to enter.

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Stopping to pat the shaggy head, and murmur a word of commendation for its good sense, she turned the handle of the door and walked into the house.

Oh, the quiet orderliness of that mean little farm-house! A vision flashed into the mind of Gertrude of what it used to be in the time of Mrs. Lorimer—when it was fairly littered from end to end with crying babies and every sort of domestic muddle—as she stepped into the spotlessly clean kitchen. It was a pleasure to come to the house now, or would have been if she could ever have found anything in the behaviour of Mrs. Bryant to make her believe that the little woman was glad to see her.

“May I come in?” asked Gertrude softly, with her hand on the latch of the bedroom door; but, receiving no answer, she softly opened it and went in unbidden.

A strong smell of drugs met her on the threshold, and, seeing Mrs. Bryant lying motionless on the bed, she went quickly forward to bend over the sleeper.

But was she asleep?

A dreadful fear took possession of Gertrude, a blackness swam before her eyes, and she bent low over the quiet form, then drew her breath in a sobbing gasp of relief as she saw the steady heave of the sleeper's chest and heard the soft intake of her breath.

If Mrs. Bryant was asleep, why had her husband said that she was so ill? Why, too, had it been necessary to send in such hot haste for the doctor?

But these were questions that she could not answer, and seeing that there was nothing for her to do she could only wait in perplexity until Mr. Bryant should come.

What a long time he was! It seemed to her that the sleeper's breath was coming more faintly. A panic took possession of Gertrude then; she was afraid that Mrs. Bryant was slipping out of life and that the poor woman would be dead before Mr. Bryant got back. In her fear

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she crept noiselessly to the door, and then, hurrying across the kitchen, gazed out over the pastures to see if he were anywhere in sight.

Ah yes! there he was, coming at a slow walk as if every step were a weariness almost too great to be endured.

Gertrude ran to meet him, catching at his hand in her agitation and haste.

"Oh, please come quickly!" she gasped. "I am afraid that Mrs. Bryant is very ill; she is so fast asleep, and her breath is coming fainter and fainter."

"Then I am afraid that the doctor will be too late!" he said. A grey hue came over his face, and before Gertrude could reach out her hands to save him he had rolled on to the ground at her feet.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Averted Tragedy

FOR a moment Gertrude gazed at the prostrate man with a sense of utter helplessness. What could she do either for Mr. Bryant, lying at her feet, or for his wife who lay in that profound slumber, which to her inexperience seemed so like the forerunner of death.

But when one is desperate it does not do to despair.

Something she must do, if only for the sake of doing. Down on her knees she went, and, snatching her hat from her head, began to fan him with it. She longed for water to bathe his white face, but did not dare leave him to get it. She wondered if by lifting his shoulders she could drag him across the stretch of meadow to the house, but did not dare to make the attempt, because somewhere at the back of her mind she seemed to remember having heard, or read, that it was sometimes fatal to move a swooning person.

Ah, he sighed then!

Oh, the almost delirious joy which took possession of her! If he were recovering, then perhaps it was an augury that the sleeper in yonder would recover too!

Then she saw a wagon turn in at the gate at the far end of the pasture, and realized with a throb of thankfulness that the messenger must have met the doctor somewhere near at hand.

Springing to her feet she waved her hat above her head

and shouted her loudest, to attract the attention of the two men in the wagon, for it would save time if they drove straight to where she was, and then Mr. Bryant could be taken to his house without further fatigue. For she guessed that it was fatigue more than anything which had caused him to tumble down at her feet in such a fainting condition.

The wagon was coming rapidly across the lumpy grass, and, stooping down, she told Mr. Bryant that the doctor was close at hand, so that Mrs. Bryant could be very quickly helped now.

"Too late, too late!" moaned the poor man, and to Gertrude's infinite distress she saw two big tears roll from his closed eyelids and disappear into his stubbly beard.

Somehow, quite unconsciously, her arms took a closer clasp of him than as she supported him in a sitting posture until the wagon with the doctor drove up.

What a long time it seemed, and yet in reality it was only a few minutes!

"Two invalids instead of one! That is unfortunate!" exclaimed the doctor as he jumped down from the wagon and came to bend over Mr. Bryant.

"Doctor, I have killed my wife!" panted the poor old man, the words almost inarticulate because of his dreadful distress.

"How?" demanded the doctor, not for a moment paying any attention to the words, which he believed to be a sort of delirious fancy of an overdriven man.

"Mrs. Bryant suffers from some sort of heart spasms. An attack came on to-day, and I went to give her the remedy which the physician in Winnipeg had ordered for her on such occasions. But when I had given her the dose she cried out that she felt so queer and that I must have given her the wrong stuff; then when I looked at

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the bottle I found that she was right and I had given her a dose of poison.

"What sort?" asked the doctor, his voice raised almost to a shout.

Mr. Bryant gasped out the name of a drug, and his whole body writhed in the frantic distress of his mind.

"Come with me. Wil! Jones will look after Mr. Bryant," snapped the doctor sharply to Gertrude. He turned towards the house, going at a run, while Gertrude pelted on behind, gathering from his manner that there might be a chance for Mrs. Bryant if they were only quick enough.

"You are sure that she is still alive?" he asked as they reached the door in company, for Gertrude was fleet of foot than he, and so had overtaken him although he had started first.

"She was alive when I left the house, only her breath seemed to me to be coming fainter and fainter," Gertrude answered promptly; and he nodded as they passed into the house together.

A moment he leant over the quiet form, then jerked up his head in a great hurry.

"I think that we are in time, but we have got to work for it," he said; then began to issue short, sharp orders, so many of them that Gertrude was kept running here and there doing all sorts of things. Presently the calls from the doctor became more insistent still, and Will Jones was summoned to help, his part of the work being to make up the fire in the stove and to boil water for a hot bath for the patient. Even Mr. Bryant stirred round to assist, now he knew that there was a chance that his wife might be saved. But it was on Gertrude that the heaviest of the work devolved, and she was so tired that it seemed as if she would fall down as she ran about. Presently, as they lifted Mrs. Bryant out of the bath and laid her back

in a blanket, the languid eyes opened slowly, and there was recognition in them.

"Am I better?" she asked in a faint tone, her question addressed to Gertrude, whose was the only face within her range of vision just then.

"Yes, you are better," replied Gertrude, whose tiredness had momentarily vanished in the moment of victory, although doubtless it would return with redoubled force later on.

"I am very glad, for my husband's sake, and for poor Tom too," Mrs. Bryant said feebly, and there was such a glow of mother love on her face as quite transfigured it.

Gertrude had rarely heard Mrs. Bryant mention her absent son before, and certainly she had never seen the little woman look like that, and had not believed that she was capable of so much affection.

"We are through the wood this time!" exclaimed the doctor cheerfully. "But she must not be allowed to go to sleep again for a little while. Ask Mr. Bryant to come in and talk to her, and then I will speak to you in the kitchen."

Away went Gertrude, wondering a little whether this long day would ever wear to eventide; for, seeing that her work had commenced with the dawn, it was not surprising that she was by this time feeling that she could not face much more in the way of exertion.

Mr. Bryant was busy with the separator, for dairy work must be done, even when the lives of dear ones are hanging on the balance; but he dropped the handle at once when Gertrude told him what was required of him, and his voice had a quaver of breakdown in it as he said:

"You have been like an angel in the house to us, Miss Amoyne. We can never hope to repay you."

"Such things are not done for reward, so there is no question of indebtedness," she answered a trifle brusquely.

She seized the handle of the separator and began to turn it briskly, asking him if he would tell the doctor to come to her in the milk room, as she could go on with the separating while she was talking to him and receiving the necessary instructions for the care of the patient.

"I will tell him. How kind you all are! Will Jones has done all the milking for me because Bill isn't back yet, and now you are working that separator. I never realized before how many good people there are in the world!"

Gertrude laughed softly when he had gone. Tired she might be, and her limbs might be aching with weariness, but at least the tragedy was averted, and the lightening of the load of anxiety was so wonderful that she felt actually light-hearted.

Will Jones came in with the last of the milk, and after an enquiry as to the welfare of the patient, went off to feed the pigs, which feasted on the separated milk thickened to a thin gruel with meal. Presently the doctor also came in, and sat down on a bench just inside the milkroom door, looking thoroughly worn out.

"I was up most of last night, and I rode nearly fifty miles yesterday," he explained in apology for his flat condition; adding, more briskly: "You must stay here to-night, if you please, just to take care of Mrs. Bryant, who does not really need any attention. It is necessary that Mr. Bryant should have an untroubled night, and that he will certainly not get if he feels himself responsible."

"Yes, I will stay," said Gertrude, thinking what a good thing it was that to-morrow was Sunday, since it would mean that there was no factory to make demands on her.

"I wonder what the neighbourhood would do without you and your sisters!" the doctor said in a reflective tone. "You are always to be found where the need is greatest, and God alone knows how terrible is the need of a woman's help in some of these lonely places! I could have scarcely

pulled that poor woman through single-handed to-night, so she owes her life as much to you as to me."

Gertrude bent her head lower over the handle of the separator, and such a thrill of gladness passed over her as she had rarely felt before. Surely it was worth living—aye, and suffering—to experience joy like that!

She called to Will Jones, who passed the door of the milkroom at that moment, and, telling him to take the separator for her, she went to the kitchen and made some tea for the tired doctor. Before the doctor's meal was done Will Jones came in to say that he had finished separating the milk and had done all the outside chores. She gave him some tea also, and then asked him to drive back to The Welcome Home to tell her sisters that she would not be home until the morning.

Mr. Bryant was next hustled off to bed, much against his will, and Bill, coming in from the hay bee, told Gertrude that the two ricks were quite finished, and that he and the M'Whortles had been the last to leave.

"It has been most as good as a holiday to-day," volunteered the hired man, as he ate his supper in the kitchen, while Gertrude was moving round putting things straight for the night. "And the grub at your place was just topping. I never tasted better custard nor cake in my life. I could do with a bee over there twice a week from now on until after harvest, and that is saying a good deal, for they know how to pull the work out of you on such occasions. I haven't worked so hard any day this five years past as I have done to-day."

"I am sure that we are all very much obliged to you," said Gertrude a little primly. Bill was not one of her favourites, by any means; but, seeing that he was one of those who had tired himself in her service to-day, she had at least to be grateful to him.

"I guess that the indebtedness ain't all on your side,"

exclaimed Bill, stretching his arms high above his head in a mighty yawn. "There is something to be said for the way in which you have helped to pull the old lady through in yonder," and he wagged his head in the direction of Mrs. Bryant's chamber door. "She don't say much—in fact I can't tell as I ever came across a more silent person in my life—but she is plumb good all through, and there ain't much I would not do for her; so if you happen to want anything unexpected in the night, perhaps you would just heave a stone at my room door. I sleep out in the little shed off the barn. You will have to throw hard to wake me, for I am not what you might call a light sleeper, and I am extra tired to-night; but you wake me, and I will come."

"I am very much obliged to you, but I hope that there will be no occasion to wake you," said Gertrude politely, although she could not repress a smile at the thought of doing target practice at Bill's door in the night, when the chances were that she would be more likely to stave the door in than to rouse him, for he was noted as the heaviest sleeper in that countryside of sound sleepers.

Mrs. Bryant was awake when she went into her room.

"Do you feel better?" asked Gertrude a little anxiously, for she was too new to this sort of sickness to be quite sure the danger was at an end.

"Oh yes, I am better! I fear that I must have given everyone a lot of trouble. I am so sorry, for of course you must have had a very heavy day, with your bee to think about. I hope it went off very well?"

"Very well indeed, thank you!" said Gertrude; and then, remembering that it was good for Mrs. Bryant to be roused and interested, she gave her a bright and particular account of how the day had gone.

"It is really wonderful what an amount of fun these farmers manage to get out of their work," Mrs. Bryant

said in a musing tone. "I could sometimes wish that I had not been so ambitious for Tom, but had let him just drift into farming, like his father."

"What is he?" asked Gertrude, and the moment after was sorry for the question, which she feared Mrs. Bryant would think an impertinence.

Mrs. Bryant smiled. "Poor boy, he is trying to be an architect, but I am not sure whether he will ever succeed in coming out at the top. I used to talk to him so much about succeeding in life that it is wonderful I have not made him hate me; for it seems to me that I gave him no peace when he was a boy. I was for ever tormenting him with my desires that he should be really great. You see, his father has always been a bit of a failure; I mean that, although he is a good man, a devoted husband, and a loving father, he has never made a conspicuous success of life, and I have so yearned to be allied to something that was brilliantly successful. Ah, Miss Amoyne, believe me it is best not to be too ambitious for other people, for that is the way bitter misunderstandings come! Tom would have been at home, cheering us with his presence, if I would have let him stay. It was my restless ambition that drove him away, and has kept him away. He wanted to come home last summer, and help his father with the harvest. But I said no. Tom had just failed, you know, and I was so afraid that he would give up struggling to pass his examinations, and would come home to drift along as his father does. If he—that is, Tom—wants to come this summer, I think that I will let him, for life is too short to waste in separations, and I have starved my mother hunger too long."

"Yes, I would let him come, if I were you," said Gertrude, "for who can say how home-sick he may be, and it is never good for a young man to be without a home." She was marvelling at the little woman's strength of will,

and the way in which Mrs. Bryant must have forced her love into the background and made it subservient to her ambition.

"I will write to him to-morrow if I am well enough. His father always writes to him every week, but I haven't done it so often as that, for letters are apt to be unsettling, especially if they are very affectionate, and I have been so anxious that he should get on with his studies," said Mrs. Bryant.

Gertrude was going to ask a string of questions about him, thinking it would please the mother to talk of her absent son; but she remembered in time how very queerly Mrs. Bryant was apt to take things, and so refrained, for she did not want to lose the advantage that she had gained, or shut the door of the woman's heart against her.

The night was quiet, although Gertrude kept starting up broad awake with the fear that all might not be well with the patient.

Each time, however, she found Mrs. Bryant either peacefully asleep or else ready to meet her enquiries with a calm smile; and so the darkness faded to the dawn, and a Sabbath of rest came for the tired workers of the countryside.

The doctor came early, and when his visit was over Gertrude went home to get a little rest for herself, while Mr. Bryant looked after his wife with his accustomed devotion, to which the little woman gave her usual listless response.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Jessica Pays a Visit

JULY went by in a whirl of work. The days were not half long enough for the four girls at The Welcome Home, and, alas! the nights were not long enough either, for the mornings mostly found them so tired still that it was a real trouble to drag themselves from their beds to take up the heavy round of duties which awaited them.

Certainly none had any chance of complaining that time hung heavy on her hands, and each night found them going to bed with many things left over which they would have liked to have done.

The factory had prospered beyond the expectations of its most ardent promoters, and everyone realized that it had come to stay. Gertrude and Delia were earning a living wage now, and there was no worry about money for the immediate needs.

Jessica had grown so much stronger through those weeks of summer that she was of the greatest help and comfort to Marion, and, strangely enough, those two, who had always agreed less well than the others, managed nowadays without any friction at all, which spoke volumes for Jessica's better health.

The Welcome Home looked pretty well crowded with poultry in these summer days, but the creatures which Marion took the greatest pride and pleasure in were the bees. They were her most profitable investment, she often declared, because they found their own food except for a few months in the year when she would have to feed them

with sugar to replace the stores she had taken from them.

Already her honey was finding a good market. There were so many flowers round the sheltered shores of the bays and the little inlets, and the bees seemed to thrive so well.

Jessica, who had been stung several times, declared that they were horrid creatures; but she was quite awake to their financial value, and after all, as she grudgingly admitted, they were not so odorous as pigs, nor so difficult to manage as turkey poults.

One day in August Gertrude came home from the factory and asked Marion if they had anything nice which they could send over to the Bryants' place, for Bill, the hired man, had told her that morning that Mrs. Bryant was ailing just now.

"I ought to have gone over to see her on Sunday; but I was so tired, and I am never quite sure that she is pleased to see me, so I did not make the effort," said Gertrude, who was feeling rather remorseful on the score of her neglect of her neighbour.

"I always feel when I go that she would just as soon I stayed away," Marion agreed. "That is why I so seldom bother her with my presence; but, of course, if she is not well it is an entirely different matter, and one of us must go over. Now, let me see, what have we got that she would like?"

Marion's tone was a trifle perplexed, for, seeing that the Bryants were farmers like themselves, what one had the other had also, and little gifts of eggs, cream, or butter would only be silly. Indeed, in most matters pertaining to food the Bryants fared more luxuriously than the family at The Welcome Home, whose food was of the plainest.

"Could you spare a section of honey?" asked Gertrude. "I know that Mr. Bryant loves honey, and Mrs. Bryant likes it as well as most things."

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"Some honey she shall have," replied Marion. "I hope that poor Mr. Bryant will eat it all himself; he must need the sweets of life to make up to him for all the bitters that he has to bear. By the way, has that wonderful son turned up yet? Or is he not coming home this summer after all?"

"I do not know. Bill did not volunteer any further information, and I did not ask," said Gertrude indifferently. Then she went on to tell Marion of a most aggravating breakdown that morning of the motor which drove the churns.

"The thing is always breaking down," said Marion, who had gone into the store-room to get the honey, and was followed by Gertrude carrying the empty cream jars that she had brought from the factory.

"It was too cheap, I am afraid. It is a great mistake to buy things of that sort at too low a price, for they are sure to give out at critical moments."

"Are you going to carry the honey over to Mrs. Bryant?" asked Marion, as she chose out a section from a store which had been taken from the hives that day.

"No, I cannot spare the time to go over there this evening, I have such a lot of booking to do. I am getting behind with the accounts, and that will never do. Could Delia or Jessica go over, do you think? I hate to seem to neglect the poor little woman, but there is no real need for me to go if one of the others will do it for me."

"I will ask Jessica. I will even suggest that she puts on her new blue frock for the purpose, and then she will not feel that it is waste effort. She looks so sweet in that blue frock, and she is well aware of the fact." Marion laughed softly as she went out to the garden, where Jessica was busy among the late raspberries.

It was plain to all the sisters that Jessica was going to

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be very good-looking, and probably none of them realized it more thoroughly than Jessica herself. But the knowledge, instead of tending to the disease commonly known as swelled head, seemed merely to give her confidence in herself and to increase her content with life in general, and so it was wholly beneficial.

"I don't mind going, and I shall love to dress up in my blue frock and to forget for a little while that there is any such thing as work in the world. But what I want to know is whether I am expected to stay over there all the evening; because in that case I shall feel thorny. I never know what to talk about to Mrs. Bryant, and it is too rude to turn my back on her while I listen to Mr. Bryant's stories of his travels.

Jessica put her basin of raspberries on the ground and stood straight up to rest her back; for she had been stooping. The raspberry canes had been neglected in the spring, and were growing up in a fearful tangle, very picturesque in appearance but very tiresome to manage, as Jessica knew to her cost.

"Oh no! You have only to give our love to Mrs. Bryant," exclaimed Marion. "You can tell her that we heard she was not very well, so we thought we would send her a little honey to tempt her appetite, and to sweeten her temper, poor dear thing; only, of course, you won't say quite all that, and then, when you have murmured all the civil speeches which you can compose on your way across the pastures, or invent on the spur of the moment, you will just turn round and come back again."

"It sounds quite promising. I will not be more than ten minutes getting ready," said Jessica. She darted into the house to put her basin of fruit in the store-room. It was pure joy to her to get out of her working frock and to array herself in the blue cotton which she and Delia had made between them. Her fair hair was braided into

a long tail which hung down her back, and it took only two minutes to slip into the blue frock, to settle the white muslin collar and cuffs to her satisfaction, and then she was ready.

But no—she glanced down at the stout boots she was wearing, which, although perfectly trim and eminently suitable for a walk across the lumpy pastures, did not fit in with her mood at the moment. Making a dash across the room, she pulled a box from the far corner of the room, and, taking from it a pair of high-heeled boots of European make, plumped down on to the floor and quickly put them on.

"There, now I feel trim!" she murmured in great satisfaction, and walked from the room with her head in the air, and a sensation of pure enjoyment tingling all over her.

She had made the frock with the help of Delia. She would wash and iron it with her own hands when it was soiled, so why should she not wear it and enjoy it to the accompaniment of boots which, although they might pinch, had about them a distinction which her other footwear certainly lacked.

"How smart you are!" cried Delia, who came in at this moment laden with a basket of clams from the shore. "Where are you going?"

"Gertrude wants me to go over to see Mrs. Bryant and take her a section of honey. I shall not be long, because I need only stay a few minutes," replied Jessica with her sunniest smile. With a wave of her hand she went out through the orchard gate, walking with little mincing steps, as best suited her very ornate footwear.

"Just fancy having the energy to dress up like that and to wear tight boots!" exclaimed Delia, sinking on to a bench which stood outside the door and fanning herself with the lid of a basket.

"Go and lie in the hammock for half an hour," said Gertrude, "and then perhaps you will possess the energy to change your frock also. I am sure that you will feel less tired if you make some sort of a toilet." She had just emerged from the bedroom looking particularly trim and cool in a soft white frock, which was plain to primness, but that was worn with the air of distinction that Gertrude always imparted to her clothes.

"You and Jessica always shame me into putting myself tidy, even when I feel most inclined to shirk the business," said Delia with a good-tempered laugh. "But I think if I have got to change my frock I will do it now and get the bother over, then I can rest in peace, unless Marion wants me. Where is she, by the way?"

"She has gone with Bruno over to the maple grove because she thinks some of the fowls are nesting there; but she will soon be back. We are going to be later at supper to-night because I have so much booking to do."

"Poor thing!" sighed Delia as she whisked the buttons of her blouse undone with so much energy that three of them flew off and rolled across the room. "You work harder than any of us, Gertrude, and it is really a shame; for, as you represent the brains of the establishment, you ought to have a little easier time of it."

"I don't mind the work, and I think that it is splendid to think how we have got on, and how the factory is paying." Gertrude drew a long sigh of satisfaction as she sat down to the books which she had brought from the factory with her. To her the joy of achievement was very great indeed, and she laughed when anyone pitied her for toilsome days, for well she knew that the work brought its own reward, and that was the main thing.

The house was very quiet after that. Delia had changed her frock and had gone out-of-doors again. A hen was clucking in an agitated fashion at the end of the barn,

calling her chickens to the resting-place which she had chosen, while the chickens, with plaintive peepings of protest, were intent on sleeping somewhere else.

Gertrude worked on steadily for half an hour, and the task she had set herself went so smoothly that by the end of the half-hour she found that her booking for the evening was done, and she also was free.

Right away in the distance came at intervals a soft sighing sound, which Gertrude knew very well: it was the tide coming in over the rocky boulders out by Spit Head, and the fact that it could be so distinctly heard warned her that rain was near, for it was one of the surest signs they had, and Marion used to call it the farm barometer.

"Rain to-morrow!" murmured Gertrude to herself. "I wonder if Marion has noticed the sound. If it is wet before morning there are some things that may suffer. I think that I had better go to meet her."

Rising with a little sigh of regret because her pleasant resting spell was over, Gertrude strolled out through the orchard into the pasture beyond, across which Marion had gone with Bruno in search of vagrant hens' nests.

When she was out beyond the trees she caught sight of Marion and Delia coming out from the shadow of the maple grove together, with Bruno careering on in front with as many gambols as if he were a puppy. Seeing that they were coming, and would soon reach home, she did not trouble to go any farther to meet them. Why should she?

Facing round at that moment, she saw, to her surprise, that Jessica was coming across the other pasture at a run.

"How foolish of her to run in this heat!" was her murmured comment. Then something in Jessica's movements arrested her attention.

What was the matter? Was Mrs. Bryant ill again.

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Gertrude caught her breath in a swift spasm of anxiety as she thought of the tragedy which had been so narrowly averted from the Bryants' home in June. Surely, surely that poor old man had not been making mistakes in his wife's medicine again.

The bare possibility thrilled her with horror, and she started running to meet Jessica, while Marion and Delia, seeing her run, began running too, although from where they were it was not possible that they could see Jessica coming.

Bruno thought it was part of the evening fun, and barked more wildly than ever, the noise of his clamour drowning all other sounds and making it impossible for Gertrude to hear what Jessica was shouting about.

Jessica was flinging up her arms, and her long tail of hair was swinging wildly as she came. She seemed past shouting now, or else it was that she felt the impossibility of making herself heard above the noise that Bruno was making.

"What is it; what is the matter? Is Mrs. Bryant ill?" called Gertrude; whereupon Jessica flourished her arms more wildly than ever, then tried to shout, but failed simply and solely from want of breath.

"I am afraid that something is dreadfully wrong!" cried Gertrude to Marion and Delia, throwing her voice back over her shoulder as she ran.

Marion heard a part of what she said, but could not understand because of Bruno's noise.

"Do cuff that dog and make him be quiet!" Marion said, panting from the haste she was making. At that moment she caught sight of Jessica, who had nearly reached Gertrude by this time.

Delia promptly leaned forward to administer a little correction to the too-jubilant Bruno, but, missing her footing, went headlong instead, striking her head on a

hard, sun-baked hummock of turf, and seeing more stars than she cared for. In the momentary confusion of her ideas she failed to hear what it was that Gertrude was shouting back to them.

Then it was Marion who took up the cry, and this time Delia heard it plain enough.

"Douglas Amoyne is alive! But where is he?"

"That is what we all want to know," cried Delia. "I thought that it was something fresh!" She scrambled to her feet and rubbed her bruises with a rueful air.

Marion had gone on at a run, and Bruno with her; but now she had turned and was tearing back again, shouting as she came: "Oh, Delia, Delia, Douglas is alive, and Jessica has seen him!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### The Mystery Explained

JESSICA, when she reached the Bryants' house, paused at the outer gate and looked round rather apprehensively, for she never could quite get over her dislike to the big black dog that guarded it. The creature knew her well enough, and always left off growling when she spoke to it. But it had such a horrid way of crouching and then dashing straight for any intruder that she was always afraid that its memory of her would go suddenly short, and that it would treat her as it did other people.

Then she heard the voice of Bill uplifted in song. He had a very good tenor voice, of which he was inordinately proud, and, having bought a book of singing exercises, he was going steadily through them as he went about his work.

The house door was open, and there came a sound of talking. Jessica half-hesitated as she stepped upon the uneven piece of paving in front of the door. Perhaps they had company. But, no; that was Mr. Bryant speaking, and he appeared to be telling one of his endless stories of the places or the people that he had seen, and she smiled broadly, thinking how bored Mrs. Bryant must be looking, for somehow the little woman always did look bored when her husband was telling his stories; but that might have been because she had heard them so many times, and so knew them by heart.

Then a laugh rang out—such a jolly, hearty laugh it

was that she came to a sudden pause of amazement, for the voice was strange.

Stay! Surely she had heard someone laugh like that before; but where?

A shiver went through her, for by some strange coincidence her thoughts went back to that time when, cold, wet, and miserable, she had been dragged out from under the collapsed tent.

Fancy remembering a wretched experience such as that on a lovely fine evening like this, and fancy shivering about it, as if it were all being enacted over again!

Quickening her steps a little, as if to run away from her unpleasant impressions, Jessica came in full view of the open door, and saw a group of three sitting about a table that was spread for a late tea or an early supper. Mr. and Mrs. Bryant were there, and a stranger who had his back to her.

"If you please, Gertrude has sent you some of our honey because she heard that——" began Jessica, and then she stopped abruptly, and stood staring with dilated eyes.

At the sound of her voice the third individual at the table—a young man—had risen and turned round; then he uttered an exclamation of amazement, and came towards her with his hand outstretched in welcome.

It was the young man who had helped them last summer, and who had gone off to warn the salvage people, but had never come back again.

Jessica uttered a loud cry, and, dropping the basket with the honey on to the floor, she turned and fled back by the way she had come. A panic of fear was upon her. She had wished so much that her cousin Douglas was dead that when she was suddenly confronted with him in life, and saw the welcome shining in his eyes, she felt as if she simply could not bear it, and the only thing left her was to flee.

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How she ran! Her tight boots were entirely forgotten now, and she pelted along as if she were running away from some dreadful danger. She heard the voice of Bill calling an enquiry as she rushed past the open door of the barn, but she was too intent on flight to stop for anyone. Her whole thought was to get home, to tell Gertrude what she had discovered, and then to shelter behind her sisters, so that the cousin whom she had so often wished dead might not see into her heart and read the thoughts which were there.

She was dreadfully tired, and there was a stitch in her side that hurt so badly; but she would not stop, she would not even slacken speed. It seemed to her that she was being pursued, and that she must run until she dropped.

Then she caught sight of Gertrude's white frock, and the feeling of comfort and security which it brought made her sob with sheer relief to think that she was within sight of her place of refuge. She tried to shout her tidings, but Bruno was making such a riot somewhere out of sight that it was plain Gertrude could not hear what she was saying.

Gertrude was running towards her now, and there was Marion coming too, with Delia pelting along in the rear. Ah no! Delia was down, having gone headlong, and even in that moment of her extreme tribulation Jessica could not forbear a gurgle of laughter at the spectacle of her sister sprawling on the sun-scorched turf.

A moment later and she was clinging to Gertrude, while Marion hovered in the background, and she was panting out her tidings.

"Cousin Douglas is having supper with the Bryants," cried Jessica, "and he got up to speak to me, but I ran away. Oh, Gertrude, do you expect that he will ever begin to guess how badly I wished him to be dead?" Shaking and shivering she clung to her sister.

"Of course he will not, or, if he does, it will not matter," replied Gertrude in that dear common-sense way that always allayed the panic of poor Jessica.

"But, Jessica, are you sure that it was he?" demanded Marion in so much doubt that even Gertrude began to wonder whether Jessica had been mistaken, for it did seem strange that the cousin who had disappeared so completely should suddenly be found as the guest of their next neighbour.

"If you don't believe me, come and see!" cried Jessica shrilly. She hated to be doubted, and she would not mind facing Douglas Amoyne if Gertrude were to be there to stand between.

"Of course we are going to see!" exclaimed Delia, who had now caught up with the others, although she was rubbing her knee with a rueful air, for the fall had been a severe one.

"Yes, come along! It will not do to put it off, or he may vanish again. He is such an exceedingly elusive young man." Marion set her mouth in lines of stern determination.

It was only about ten minutes ago that she had confided to Delia that she was so tired she could not walk any more that evening; no, not if she were to be paid for it! But now she had forgotten her fatigue, and was only keen on meeting her cousin.

"But the house—it is all unfastened," cried Gertrude; "even the door is open!" Her face was all aglow with a happy light.

The news which Jessica had brought had lifted a great burden from her heart. Douglas was not dead, so her suffering and her confession had not been in vain.

"Oh, never mind the house! Bruno can go back and look after that. We shall not be long away," said Marion. "Here, Bruno, old fellow, go home and guard!" She

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flung her hand, with an imperative gesture, in the direction of the house as she spoke, and away went Bruno, for he had received the same order too many times before to make any mistake about it now.

"Now then, best foot first, or Douglas may have vanished before we get there!" cried Marion. With one consent they pressed forward, hurrying across the pastures as fast as they could go.

"I wonder what Mrs. Bryant will say and think when the whole four of us come marching in?" said Delia, with a little squeal of laughter, which Marion always called her horse-laugh because she declared it reminded her of the neigh of a horse.

"She will be properly shocked, I expect," answered Marion, "and she will say in her little prim way, after we are gone, that it is a great pity those four Amoyne girls have not some middle-aged relative to live with them, for they are quite too flighty to be left to themselves." The two laughed again in a light-hearted fashion.

Gertrude and Jessica were the silent ones in that walk across the pastures, while the August twilight came brooding gently down and the sun sank out of sight amid a splendour of crimson and gold.

Gertrude was too happy for words, and Jessica was too miserable. It did seem horrid that she should have been the one to stumble on Douglas Amoyne, seeing that it was she who had so strenuously insisted that he was dead. Poor Jessica! It was only now that she was realizing how very much she had clung to the belief that he was really dead. And now to find there was no more chance of the money ever coming to them was really very sad!

The others all seemed so content to be poor, and she had honestly tried to be content also. Indeed she had achieved a sort of negative content, and she never outwardly rebelled against poverty and hard work now. But

always in the back of her mind there had been lurking the hope that things would come right for them some day, and that it would be made clear that they were to have the money which their uncle had left. Now her castles in the air had all been swept away. She felt suddenly tired and very old—quite middle-aged, in fact. She sighed heavily once or twice, but no one noticed—not even Gertrude.

Feeling rather hurt by this neglect, Jessica stole a look at her eldest sister, and was amazed at the happiness of Gertrude's face. It was a literally transformed Gertrude, and she drew a quick breath of astonishment. Never, never, had she seen Gertrude look like that! Why, she was absolutely radiant, and she looked about ten years younger than usual! Fancy anyone being so glad at the prospect of never being well off again!

Bill had left off singing, and had gone off somewhere, for the barn was shut up, and all the animals seemed to have gone to rest. Even the black dog was off duty, although, when they arrived at the open door, the four sisters saw the creature standing with its nose thrust into the hand of the young man who had frightened Jessica so much.

He—the young man—was on his feet now, as if he were about to leave the room, and he was talking very earnestly to Mrs. Bryant; but he turned hastily at the sound of footsteps, and then, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, he sprang forward to greet the new-comers.

Gertrude held out both hands in greeting, and her voice thrilled and trembled as she cried: "Cousin Douglas, why have you hidden away so long? And why did not you tell us who you were when we met last summer?"

The young man, who had been pressing eagerly forward to greet her, drew back swiftly, while an expression which made Marion think he was offended came upon his face.

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"Pardon, my name is not Douglas," he replied. There was no mistaking the haughtiness of the intonation, while he flung up his head, squared his shoulders, and looked as if he were prepared to assert what he said in the face of the whole world.

Gertrude's hands dropped limply to her side, and she gazed at him in uncomprehending bewilderment. "But you are Douglas Amoyne?"

"Indeed I am not!" he answered with some heat. "I am Tom Bryant, as my father and mother here can testify."

"Then where is Douglas Amoyne?" asked Gertrude. By the sound of her voice it seemed almost as if she were speaking for the sake of gaining time.

"Douglas Amoyne is dead; that I know, for I was with him when he passed away, poor fellow!"

A yell—it was nothing else—from Jessica made them all jump, and Gertrude turned to hush her with an utterly scandalized expression, for there was pure jubilation in the sound. Then she turned back to the young man who had called himself Tom Bryant, and asked with a touch of anxiety: "When did he die? And where?"

"Twelve months ago last February it was, and he died in a little shack in the woods wide of New Westminster. But he told me that there was no one to write to, that he had no people worth talking about, and that there was no one whom the tidings of his death would concern. So this evening, after your sister came and bolted away again in such a hurry, and my father told me that her name was Amoyne, I never dreamed that I was stumbling on to the kin of Douglas."

There was no mistaking the sincerity in the young man's face, and no doubting the story he told. It was plain to Gertrude that her unfortunate cousin had died before his father; and so her confession, and all the suffering which



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had gone before it, had been quite unnecessary if only she had known.

"Oh, what a shame, and we have been so poor for just nothing at all!" cried Jessica. She would be no longer repressed, and was intent on letting this young man know of the mischief he had done in depriving them of the means of livelihood and forcing them to work so hard for a living.

"Why did you hide away so carefully?" demanded Marion. But there was only curiosity, not blame, in her tone, for she at least had no quarrel with this young man who had so strangely been mixed up in their lives, and apparently from no intention on his part of interference in their concerns.

"I think that you will have to explain a little," said Tom; "for remember that I am very much a stranger here, and I do not understand what I have done to upset that young lady so greatly." He nodded his head in the direction of Jessica, who was labouring under tremendous excitement.

"Oh, Jessica, do not be so ridiculous!" implored Delia, giving the culprit a little shake, for Jessica was dancing now, whirling round and round on the tips of her toes like a mad creature, and Delia felt really shocked. Surely it was bad taste to make such an open exhibition of gladness over the death of poor Douglas, even though it did mean enrichment and a lot of other things.

"Don't you think it would be better if you sat down to talk, Miss Amoyne? I am quite sure that your days are hard enough to make standing a very unnecessary toil at this end of the day." The calm voice of Mrs. Bryant broke in upon the whirling confusion of Gertrude's brain and soothed the tumult as nothing else could have done.

She became suddenly aware that she was tired and overwrought, that she was making a most terrible exhi-

bition of herself, and that the thing in life which she most ardently desired just then was to go quietly home and recover at her leisure from this shock which she had just received.

"Yes, please sit down, if only for the sake of letting me say thank you for all you did for me last summer when you took care of that stranded schooner for me, and I never came back to say that I was grateful." As he spoke, Tom was hospitably drawing chairs forward for them to sit upon and gently urging the still-dancing Jessica to sit down until the necessary explanations had cleared the air somewhat.

"We must not stop now," said Gertrude firmly, for she fancied there was disapproval in the eyes of Mrs. Bryant, and that was enough for her.

Mr. Bryant had been hovering on the outskirts of the excited group, lighting a lamp, and hustling things into order. He had even shut the door and slipped the bolt, so that if Bill should happen to come strolling up there would be no danger of the hired man seeing or hearing more than was convenient for outsiders to know. The situation was so full of mystery to Mr. Bryant that he was imagining all kinds of vague possibilities; but it is only safe to say that he never by any chance guessed that his son was innocently keeping these four girls from the inheritance which rightly belonged to them.

Now it was Marion who came to the help of Gertrude, for she was remembering that they had come away leaving the house door open, and for aught she knew the store-room door might be unfastened also, and it was open to doubt whether Bruno might not go in search of his own supper. If by any chance, in such a case, he ate to-morrow's dinner by mistake, it would be really tragic.

"We must certainly go now," she broke in cheerfully, her voice sounding reassuringly commonplace. "But

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perhaps Mr. Tom Bryant will promise not to disappear again before to-morrow, and then we can get him to write down the facts about the death of our cousin to send to Mr. Carson."

"I will certainly endeavour not to disappear before to-morrow," Tom answered, with a laugh. "But first of all I am going to ask to be allowed to walk home with you. Then, on the way, you will tell me why it is you were so sure that I was Douglas Amoyne, and also why I seem to have upset things generally."

"We shall be very glad if you will come with us; only, if you are a stranger, perhaps you will have some difficulty in finding the way back. The pastures are so misleading after dark, and the moon will not be up yet." Gertrude's voice had taken on a prim chilliness, and remembering the thrill in it when she had greeted him, and the radiance of her welcoming smile, the young man told himself that it was not fair, that he was not going to put up with it, and he meant to be welcomed for himself if possible.

But outwardly he was just pleasant and friendly, most dreadfully curious to know why he had been mistaken for a man who had been dead so long, and, when he did know, filled with remorse to think that he had been the innocent cause of their having to face such a reverse of fortune.

"Oh, please don't be so sad about it!" cried Marion, as they all went slowly across the dusky pastures. "I at least have enjoyed living at The Welcome Home, and now I have got what I want I do not mean to give it up. I shall be twenty-one next year, and then I can do as I like; and I mean to keep on farming."

"I should fancy that you nearly always do as you like, if one might judge from appearances," said Tom, with a funny little bow. He had queer, old-fashioned notions as to how ladies should be treated, and the girls thought his

manners were the strangest jumble of respectful admiration and good comradeship that they had met so far.

Going across the dry lumpy turf of the pastures, they told him all the story of the way they had come to believe he was their missing cousin, and when it was done, with one voice they called upon him to explain his share in the mystery, and to tell them how he came to be in possession of so many things which had belonged to Douglas.

"There is not much to tell, and that much is not very interesting," he answered. "I found Douglas in the snow outside New Westminster on New Year's Day twelve months ago last winter. He was ill, poor chap, and destitute, save for the few things he had in a valise, and the clothes he stood up in. I had a little shack in the country at that time, for I found it cheaper living so than boarding in the city, and I took him home. We shared the shack after that, and he stayed with me until he died. He was ill all the time, and it was plain from the very first that he could not get better.

"I wanted him to go into the hospital; but he had such a horror of it that I would not press him, even though he would have had more comfort there. He would never say much about his home or his young days; but he always stoutly declared that there was no one left alive to whom his death mattered in the least. So when he had gone I had no hesitation in sticking to the few bits he left behind him. There were a dozen or so of books, a choice assortment of pipes, knives, and things of that sort, everything luxurious in make and get-up, from which I gathered that he came of moneyed people. Did he?"

"Uncle Joseph was very well off—that was the father of Douglas—but we were poor," explained Gertrude; and then, with a nod of understanding, Tom Bryant took up his story again.

"I was badly plucked in my exam. that spring after

Douglas died. You see, I had lost a good bit of time and a lot of sleep during the last weeks of his life, and I was not fresh when it came to the heavy strain of the work. My failure hit my mother hard, for there is nothing the poor little woman hates like failure; and when I wanted to go home and help with the harvest she just said that I had better not. She wanted me to work all the time so that I would not fail when the next exam. came. It was of no use to tell her that I was just worn out with striving and that what I wanted most in the world was to forget for a few weeks that there was any such thing as drawing and calculating in the world. As I could not go home I made up my mind to camp for two or three weeks by the sea and let the tiredness soak out of me. I packed up a few things which seemed necessary and desirable, strapped them on to my very ancient bicycle, and pedalled all the way from New Westminster to Clamping Bay. Having found the place where I thought I would like to stay, I next managed to pick up a tent very cheap second-hand, and came to camp in Clamping Bay."

"That is where we crossed your track," interjected Marion.

"Just so. Or, more correctly speaking, where I crossed yours. I went to the salvage people, as I suppose you know. I was on my way back again, feeling very blue and disappointed because I was not first in the field—I was riding hard too—when that ancient cycle of mine collapsed much after the fashion of the Deacon's one-hoss shay, in the poem of—what is his name?"

"Oliver Wendell Holmes?" suggested Gertrude.

"I suppose so; anyhow the bicycle collapsed, and I collapsed with it, coming a terrific smash. The next thing I knew I was in a shack by the shore, being tended by a deaf man. Downright good to me he was, but never a word could I make him understand. He could not read

or write. He did not know what I meant when I tried to talk to him with my lips, and how I got through and recovered without a doctor is a fair puzzle to me. There were no bones broken, although I was bruised and strained from head to foot. I must have been there for weeks. When I did get better, and was able to get out again, I managed to clear up my camp belongings, though they were very much damaged by the wet. My queer host would not take any reward for all that he had done for me, and when I came away the only thing I could do for him was to leave a few dollars in the pockets of some clothes which were hanging in the shack."

"Those same dollars are at present in the hands of the police, and you can have them, if you like, by personally applying for them," interrupted Gertrude.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Your poor deaf host is dead; his body was found on the shore by some prospectors," she replied, her voice faltering a little as she thought of that night when they had searched so long for Jessica, and then had been asked to help carry the nameless dead to Poplar Ridge.

"I want to know all about it——" began Tom, suddenly realizing how very interesting these summer holidays of his were likely to prove.

But by this time they had reached the gate of the orchard. Bruno greeted them with a joyous outburst of barking, and came bouncing out as if he were prepared to eat anyone who crossed his path as an intruder.

The joyful clamour died to a sudden growl as Bruno realized there was a stranger present, and Tom declared that the dog recognized him from last year, and still bore a grudge against him for his attempt to pay a call at the camp when Bruno was in charge.

"He is such a very good guardian that we must forgive him a few blunders," said Marion. Then they bade their

escort good-night, telling him that he might come over in the morning for the remainder of the story.

They stood in a little group on the door-step, watching him disappear into the shadows, and then Jessica plumped on to the ground to take off her tight boots, which had been hurting her so badly for the last half-hour.

"I need never wear them again. For of course I shall be able to have smart boots when I want them now," she said in a tone of great satisfaction, as she sat on the ground chafing her poor aching feet and comforting them with what she called a real petting.

"Oh dear, that young man must have thought us all clean crazy when we rushed into the house and fell upon his neck to kiss the returning prodigal!" exclaimed Delia flippantly.

"We did not fall upon his neck," Marion corrected her. "At least I did not. You should speak for yourself, and leave other people out of it."

"I did not have a chance to fall upon his neck," murmured Delia softly. "He did not seem to see anyone but Gertrude, and she—but I have never seen Gertrude look as she did to-night; and, honestly, my prophetic soul has been taking glimpses into the future."

"It is time we went to bed," interrupted Gertrude hastily, but with a ring of pure happiness in her voice as she went on: "If we don't make haste and get to sleep, my prophetic soul says that morning will find us feeling anything but fit to get up. That will never do, you know, because of the factory."

"But you will not run the factory, now that the money will come to us," interrupted Jessica with a note of anxiety in her voice.

"I hope that I shall continue to do my duty by the people that have trusted their interests in my hands, and so I shall make the butter as I have been doing," Gertrude

replied with a touch of severity. It was her way of reproving Jessica, and as usual it was quite sufficient.

"What an evening it has been!" exclaimed Marion, as they undressed, with the door between the bedrooms open, as was their wont. "I think it is just lovely that kind young man is not dead! He must have been good to Douglas, nursing him to the end in that fashion, and without any sort of payment too. He must be a rather reserved sort, though; for, just fancy, he did not tell his mother why he failed!"

"If you had been in his place, would you have told?" asked Gertrude. "Mrs. Bryant is just gone mad on success, and it must have almost turned her son sullen to know that his mother cared more for what he could do than for himself."

"I say, what about the money that we had for discovering news of Douglas?" asked Delia sleepily. "Should that belong to Mr. Tom Bryant by rights; for, after all, it was he and not we who discovered Douglas, and cared for him too."

"We discovered Mr. Bryant, though, so it is all the same in the long run," said Marion nervously. She was remembering it was that money which bought The Welcome Home.

"If we have Uncle Joseph's money we can surely spare the reward to the man who tended Douglas to the end!" said Gertrude, and, the last word being spoken, they all went to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### The End

Two years had passed away, and again it was summer on Clamping Bay. But it was summer with a difference now. At least the sun shone on a very different set of circumstances to what it had seen three years before, when the four Amoyne girls had first come to camp on the sands, to rejoice in the leisure which their new-found wealth had brought for them, and to have the greatest holiday of their lives.

It had been a desolate and abandoned neighbourhood then, as solitary a bit of shore as could be found anywhere within fifty miles on either side.

Now the district immediately round the shores of the bay was populated with a vigorous hard-working class of people, who, though they might not hope to get rich at farming, need not suffer from want, if only they worked hard. Out on the marshes, beyond Spit Head, tons and tons of hay had been cut and carried, while the level stretches of land served now as pasture for hundreds of sheep and cattle. Much of the marsh was already fenced. Private property it was now, and the fence rails had been cut from the inferior woodlands fringing the shore.

Quite a small town of canvas dotted the bay this summer, and swarms of happy children made merry on the smooth stretches of sand. The fame of the place had reached to the busy towns of the foot-hills, and the people who were so busy in wresting wealth from the dim recesses of the

hills were glad to have a place within easy access to which they might send their children for a summer holiday.

The orchard surrounding The Welcome Home had grown into wide stretches of fruit-trees. It is easy to plan orchards and to plant them when there is the needful capital behind to turn the ventures into a financial success. The house had grown as well as the orchards, and there was even a line of glass houses in the rear which just now showed vines and tomatoes in a fine state of forwardness.

Marion was enabled to let her passion for growing things have full sway in these times, and she was just coming back from a round of her property, feeling on the whole rather well satisfied with the outlook generally.

She had had some failures, it is true. Those apricots over in the hollow behind the maple grove had not done as well as she had expected them to do, and the expense she had incurred with them would take off a big bunch of her profits on the other things that had done so much better.

The way to success always lies through trying, and one must fail sometimes. Perhaps the trees would do better next year. If they did not, then she would grub them up, and plant the ground with apples or pears.

"But I am not going to be beaten without a try for success," she murmured, as she trudged along talking to herself, although Bruno took the remark as addressed to himself, and gave a short bark by way of answer.

It was the bark that made Marion come back with a start, for her thoughts had just then been very far away.

"Tired, are you? Poor old dog!" she murmured, and stooped to pat the shaggy head, smiling into the eyes of the creature, which gazed into hers with so much affection.

Bruno was a hero in these days, for only last winter, when the snows lay deep on the shores of Clamping Bay, he had met a timber wolf in a fierce encounter, and had

not come off second-best. The wolf was worrying one of the Bryants' sheep, but it was Bruno which worried the wolf in the end, although the tussle was so severe that Bruno had been forced to retire on an old-age pension, and leave the duty of guard to another and younger dog. Of course this was a bitter humiliation; but, like other hard things, it had its compensations. He was able to go out with Marion nowadays instead of having to stick at home to warn intruders away. With so many strangers encamping on the shores of the bay there were always people coming to the house on one pretext or another, so that the work of guard was doubled and trebled from the old days when a stranger a week was the ordinary allowance in summer, while in winter a whole month would go by without anyone out of the ordinary coming along.

It was not only on the shore and at The Welcome Home that changes had been in progress: the difference at the factory was more remarkable still. The original farm-house had grown far too small for the work which had to be done, and a brand-new building had been put up and fitted with the most up-to-date machinery which could be bought for money. They had automatic weighers now, and weird machines which took the golden butter, pinching and prodding it into shape. Other machines turned it about here and flung it there, until the finished product was among the best which the markets of the Dominion produced. Here again it was capital which had helped development, and the money which Joseph Amoyne had gathered was being used to help a struggling people to get their produce on the market in the best-possible fashion.

Although it was Gertrude who had planned the factory, and helped its growth into a paying concern with labour as well as money, she was out of it now, having taken to a new vocation which seemed likely to last her a lifetime. She had married Tom Bryant just a month ago, and was

even now on her honeymoon in California, while Jessica was away at a training-college in Victoria, and was expected home for vacation in about a week.

There was only Delia at home with Marion, but Mme Delarey was spending the summer with them, and they had a vigorous English girl living with them as a help, for the work of house and farm was far too much for Marion and Delia, especially at this time of the year, when so many things out-of-doors were calling for attention.

Gertrude's marriage had been almost a calamity to Marion, who felt as if she would never be happy again with the capable elder sister away.

Gertrude's home, for the present at least, was to be in New Westminster, for Tom was a rising architect now, and likely to go high in his profession. The thousand dollars which had been duly paid to him from the estate of Joseph Amoyne for news of Douglas had proved the stepping-stone to fortune for him, and on the strength of it he had dared to ask Gertrude to marry him. It is doubtful whether he would have summoned courage to aspire so greatly had it not been for the remembrance of the look of welcome in her eyes when she had stepped into his mother's sitting-room and greeted him as the cousin whom she supposed was to inherit Uncle Joseph's money.

It had amazed Tom then that anyone could look a welcome like that who stood to lose as much as Gertrude and her sisters; and the knowledge that one woman at least of his acquaintance preferred friendship to money had made him desire from that woman the love that money could not buy.

No need to ask if Gertrude was happy. All unconsciously to herself she had made a hero of the man whom she supposed to be her missing cousin, and from hero-worship to love is a step so small that even the most timid may not stumble in taking it.

When Marion reached the house with Bruno, after her walk, she was met by Delia in a great state of excitement.

"There is a letter from Gertrude, and I opened it although it was addressed to you. And, Marion, they will be here the day after to-morrow. Jessica is already with them, and Tom wants to know if we can send a wagon to meet them."

"I expect we can. Are they going to stay here or with the Bryants?" asked Marion, looking thoughtful; for, although the house was larger than in the old days, still there would not be much room to move when Mr. and Mrs. Bryant and Jessica arrived, in addition to the people who were already under the roof.

Delia began to laugh. "Don't worry yourself. The dear romantic things are going to camp down on the shore just where we had the tent three years ago. Jessica wants to have a tent down there too; but, as Gertrude does not like the thought of her being alone at night, she wants to know if you can spare me to camp with them. I should love it, if only for the sake of finding out how different I am to the silly little girl I was three years ago."

"You can go, of course, and if canvas palls upon you it would be nice to let Miss Ellis have a night or two on the shore. She has never slept in a tent in her life, and, after all, one of the pleasantest kinds of holiday is to sample a new experience, I fancy." Marion took the letter as she spoke, and began reading it, while a sort of homesick longing for a sight of Gertrude's face came over her, and she turned her head quickly, so that she should not betray to Delia what a little stupid she really was.

It was in that moment of turning her head that the date of the letter caught her attention, and she noticed that it had been somehow delayed.

"Why, it is to-day that they are coming!" she cried.

"Oh, Delia, whatever shall we do? What a poor welcome for her to come walking in and find herself not expected!"

"As if that would matter in the very least!" exclaimed a dear familiar voice from the doorway, and Marion turned in a great hurry to see Gertrude coming in at the door.

"Oh, you darling! Where did you spring from?" cried Marion, literally flinging herself into her sister's arms; while Delia danced round and round in a perfect ecstasy of joyfulness; and Bruno barked so uproariously that the help, whose name was Miss Ellis, and Mme Delarey, both came running in from the garden to see what the matter could be.

Tom and Jessica entered at this moment, and there was so much talking and laughter, so many questions to be asked, that for the moment Marion forgot to enquire how it was the travellers managed to get themselves conveyed from the depot.

"We should have been sitting on our baggage now, and debating whether to hike it or to wait until your wagon appeared to fetch us," explained Tom. "But just as we had made up our minds to tramp all those weary miles, and Jessica was sorting over her baggage to find a pair of boots that were fit to walk in, Victor Green came along with one of W. W.'s wagons. It did not take us long to strike a bargain with him, and then we loaded ourselves into the wagon instead of the barrels of sugar and pork which he had come to fetch, and here we are."

"But we can't stay now, for Victor has gone on with the tents and things, and we want to pitch them at once. Will you come and help, Marion, or are you too busy?" and Gertrude thrust her arm through Marion's, the two going off together, while Tom stayed behind to speak to Mme Delarey and Miss Ellis.

Then he set off at a run to catch the others, while Delia and Jessica pelted along in the rear, and Bruno leaped at

the side, filling the air with the noise of his barking while he pretended that he was a puppy again.

"If we help you pitch the tents you will have to spare us Jessica to help us with the evening work; that is only fair," said Delia, who was rather inclined to be plump, and always panted a great deal when she began to run. Jessica, on the other hand, was tall and thin, and she could run like a hare.

"We will spare her certainly. We will do anything in reason to make ourselves agreeable," said Tom. Then, as they came in sight of the great spread of the bay, he exclaimed in surprise: "Why, it is like a fair down here. Where do all the people come from?"

"You had better ask them if you want to know," replied Delia pertly. "Didn't we tell you that Clamping Bay was booming just now? A very different state of things to that wet night when you helped to save us from a premature death from suffocation by dragging us out from under the collapsed tents."

"Truly it is!" he answered. Then they all plunged into the work of pitching the tents and making everything comfortable for a few weeks under canvas.

Later on, when the work was done and the three girls had gone back to The Welcome Home, husband and wife were left alone on the shore.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked abruptly, for Gertrude's face was set in strange lines of pain.

"I was going over again that day when I came upon your deserted camp and thought that you were Douglas Amoyne," she answered.

"Well?"

She hesitated a moment, then said in a low voice: "One of the hardest things I ever had to do was to come back here, to the place of failure, and take up the life at The Welcome Home. But if I had not come, if I had not

given way to Marion and settled down to farming, then the mystery might never have been cleared up, and I should never have found my happiness."

"And I should have missed mine," he said soberly. "The path of duty is not always a pleasant way, and self-sacrifice is mostly hard; but such things bring their own reward, and the place of failure becomes the very spot where we begin to make a success of things."

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