

The Torch Bearer: A Camp Fire Girls' Story

Ida Treadwell Thurston

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Opening pages

THE TORCH BEARER

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BY I. T. THURSTON

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THE TORCH BEARER

A Camp Fire Girls' Story

by

I. T. THURSTON

Author of "The Bishop's Shadow," "The Scout Master of Troop 5," Etc.,
Etc.

Illustrated

[Illustration: The Torch Bearer]

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The clear, musical call, rising from the green tangle of the forest that fringed the bay, seemed to float lingeringly above the treetops and out over the wide stretch of gleaming water, to a girl in a green canoe, who listened intently until the last faint echo died away, then began paddling rapidly towards the wooded slope. The sun, just dropping below the horizon, flooded the western sky with a blaze of colour that turned the wide waters into a sea of gold, through which the little craft glided swiftly, scattering from its slender prow showers of shining drops.

"I'm going to find out what that means," the girl said under her breath. "It sounds like an Indian call, but I'm sure those were not Indian voices."

On and on, steadily, swiftly, swept the green canoe, until, rounding a wooded point, it slipped suddenly into a beautiful little cove where there was a floating dock with a small fleet of canoes and rowboats surrounding it, and steps leading up the slope. The girl smiled as she stepped lightly out on the dock, and fastened her canoe to one of the rings.

"A girls' camp it surely is," she said to herself. "I'm going to get a glimpse of it anyhow."

Running up the steps, she followed a well-trodden path through a pine grove, and in a few minutes, through the trees, she caught the gleam of white tents and stopped to reconnoitre. A dozen or more tents were set irregularly around an open space; also there was a large frame building with canvas instead of boarding on two sides, and adjoining this a small frame shack, evidently a kitchen--and girls were everywhere.

"O, I'm hungry for girls!" breathed the one peering through the green branches. "I wonder if I dare venture----" She broke off abruptly, staring in surprise at a group approaching her. Then she ran forward crying out, "Why, Anne Wentworth--to think of finding you here!"

"To think of finding *you* here, Laura Haven! Where did you drop from?" cried the other. The two were holding each other's hands and looking into each other's faces with eyes full of glad surprise.

"I? I didn't drop--I climbed--up the steps from the landing," Laura laughed. "I was out on the bay in my canoe--we came up yesterday in the yacht--and I heard that beautiful Indian call, and I just *had* to find out where it came from, and what it meant. I suspected a girls' camp, but of course I never dreamed of finding you here. Do tell me all about it. It is a camp, isn't it?"

"Yes, we are Camp Fire Girls," Anne Wentworth replied. She glanced behind her, but the others had disappeared. "They vanished for fear they might be in the way," she said. "O Laura, I'm so glad you're here, for this is the night for our Council Fire. You can stay to it, can't you--I'm sure you would be interested."

"Stay--how long? It's after sunset now."

"O, stay all night with me, and all day to-morrow. You must stay to the Council Fire to-night, anyhow."

"I'd love to dearly, but father won't know where I am." Laura's voice was full of regret.

"Why can't you go back and tell him? I'll go with you," Anne suggested.

"Will there be time before your Council Fire?"

"Yes, if we hurry--wait one minute." Anne called to the nearest girl, gave her a brief message, and turned again to her friend. "Come on, we've no time to lose, but I know how you can make a canoe fly," she said, and hand-in-hand the two went scurrying through the grove and down to the landing. Then while the canoe swept swiftly over the water, Anne Wentworth answered the eager questions of her friend.

"It's a new organisation--the Camp Fire Girls," she explained. "It is something like the Boy Scouts only, I think, planned on broader lines and with higher and finer ideals--at any rate it is better suited for girls. It aims to help them to be healthy, useful, trustworthy, and happy.

Health--work--love--as shown in service--these are the ideals on which we try to build. We have three grades. First a girl becomes a Wood Gatherer; then after passing certain tests, a Fire Maker, then a Torch Bearer."

"And which are you?" Laura asked.

"I'm a Guardian--that is, I am the head of one of our city Camp Fires. Mrs. Royall is our Chief Guardian." She went on to explain about the work and play, the tests and rewards, ending with, "But you'll understand it all so much better after our Council Fire to-night."

Laura nodded. "What kind of girls is it for--poor girls--working girls?" she asked.

"It is for any kind of girls--just girls, you know. Of course we can't admit any bad ones, nothing else matters. Dorothy Groves is one of my twelve, and I've two dear little High School girls; all the rest are working girls. They can stay here at the camp only two weeks--some of them only ten days--the working girls, I mean, and it would make your heart ache to see how much those ten days mean to them, and how intensely they enjoy even the commonest pleasures of camping out."

"Who pays for them?" Laura demanded.

"They pay for themselves. It's no charity, and the charges are very low. They wouldn't come if it were charity."

Laura shook her head half impatiently. "It's so hard to get a chance really to help the ones who need help most," she said.

"Yes, it surely is," Anne agreed; and then they were alongside the big white yacht with its shining brass, and Judge Haven was helping them up the steps.

Fifteen minutes later they were on their way back to the camp, but this time in a boat rowed by two of the crew. The last golden gleam of the afterglow was fading slowly in the West as the two girls came again through the pines into the open space between the tents. Mrs. Royall met them and made Laura cordially welcome.

"She's just the right one--a real camp mother," Anne said, as she led her friend over to a group gathered on the grass before one of the tents. "And these are my own girls," she added, introducing each by name.

[Illustration: "At last a tiny puff of smoke arose"]

"You've got to take me right in," Laura told them. "I can't help it if I am an odd number--I'm going to belong to this particular Camp Fire to-night."

"Of course we'll take you in, and love to. Aren't you Miss Anne's friend?" said one, as she snuggled down on the grass beside Laura. "It's so nice you came on our Council Fire night!"

Laura's eyes swept the group. "It must be nice--you all look so happy," she answered.

Anne Wentworth excused herself for a few minutes, and Laura settled back against a tree with a little sigh of content. "I've been abroad for a year," she said, "and it seems so good to be with girls again--American girls! Please, won't you forget that I am here and talk just as if I were not? I want to sit still and enjoy the place and you and--everything, for a bit, before your Council begins."

With ready courtesy they took her at her word, and chatted of camp plans and happenings until the talk was interrupted by a clear musical call that floated softly out of the gathering dusk.

"How beautiful! What is it?" Laura asked as all the girls started up.

"It's the bugle call to the Council," one explained, "and here comes Miss Anne."

Laura glanced curiously at her friend's dress. It was a long loose garment of dark brown, fringed at the bottom and the sleeves. A band of beadwork was fastened over her forehead, and she wore a long necklace of bright-coloured beads.

"What is it--a robe of state?" Laura inquired.

"Yes, the ceremonial dress," Anne told her, "but you can't see in this light how pretty it is. Come on, we must join the procession."

"What has become of your girls?" Laura asked. "They were here a moment ago."

"They have gone to get their necklaces," Anne returned. "My girls are all Wood Gatherers as yet--we've not been organised long, you know; but they've been working hard for honours, and for every honour they are entitled to add a bead to their necklaces."

"Yours then must represent a great many honours."

"Yes," Anne replied. "You see it incites the girls to work for honours when they see that their Guardians have worked and won them. The red beads show that the wearer has won health honours by keeping free from colds, headaches, etc., for a number of months, or by sleeping out of doors, or doing some sort of athletics--walking, swimming, rowing, and the like. The blue ones are for nature study, the black and gold for

business, and so on. Each bead has a meaning for the girl--it tells a story--and the more she wins, the finer her record, of course."

"What a splendid idea! And how the girls will prize their necklaces by-and-by, and enjoy recalling the stories connected with them!"

"Yes," Anne agreed, "they will hand them down to their daughters as a new kind of heirloom, but----" with a laugh she added, "that's looking a long way ahead, isn't it?"

By this time the two were in the midst of a merry procession of girls from twelve to twenty, perhaps a third of them wearing the ceremonial dress.

"What a gay company they are!" Laura commented, as the procession followed a winding path through the woods, a few carrying lanterns. "Is there anything in the world, Anne, lovelier than a crowd of happy girls?"

"Nothing," her friend assented in a low tone. "And, Laura, if you could only see the difference a few days here make in some of the girls who have had all work and no play--like some of mine! It is so delightful to see them grow merry and glad day by day. But here we are. This is our Council Chamber."

"I want as many eyes as a spider so that I can look every way at once," Laura cried as the girls arranged themselves in a large circle. "What are those girls over there doing?"

"They are the Fire Makers. They were Wood Gatherers for over three months, and have met the requirements for the second class. Some of the others are to be made Fire Makers to-night. Watch Mary Walsh--the one rubbing two sticks. She will make fire without matches--or at least she will try to."

The girl, with one knee on the ground, was rubbing one stick briskly back and forth in the groove of another. A little group beside her watched her with eager interest, two of them holding lanterns, and Mrs. Royall stood

near her, watch in hand. The talk and laughter had ceased as the circle formed, and now in silence, all eyes were centred on the girl. Faster and faster her hands moved to the accompaniment of a whining, scraping sound that rose at intervals to a shrill squeak. At last a tiny puff of smoke arose, and the girl blew carefully until she had a glowing spark, which she fed with tiny shreds of wood, until suddenly it blazed up brightly. Then, springing lightly to her feet, she stood erect, the flaming wood in her outstretched hand distinctly revealing her happy, triumphant face against the dark background of the pines.

There was a quick clamour of applause as Mrs. Royall announced, "Thirty seconds within the time limit, Mary. Well done! Now light the Council Fire."

The girl stepped forward and touched her flaming brand to the wood that had been made ready by the other Fire Makers, and soon the flames began to blaze and crackle, filling the air with a spicy fragrance, and sending a vivid glow across the circle of intent young faces. Laura caught her breath as she looked around the circle.

"What a picture!" she whispered. "It is lovely--lovely!"

At a signal from Mrs. Royall the girls now gathered closer about the fire and began to chant all together,

"Wohelo--wohelo--wohelo. Wohelo means love. We love love, for love is the heart of life. It is light and joy and sweetness, Comradeship and all dear kinship. Love is the joy of service so deep That self is forgotten. Wohelo means love."

Then louder swelled the chorus,

"Wohelo for aye, Wohelo for aye, Wohelo, wohelo, wohelo for aye."

The last note was followed by a moment of utter silence; then one side of the circle chanted,

"Wohelo for work!"

and the opposite side flung back,

"Wohelo for health!"

and all together they chorused exultantly,

"Wohelo, wohelo, wohelo for love!"

Then in unison, led by Anne Wentworth, the beautiful Fire Ode was repeated,

"O Fire! Long years ago when our fathers fought with great animals you were their great protection. When they fought the cold of the cruel winter you saved them. When they needed food you changed the flesh of beasts into savoury meat for them. During all the ages your mysterious flame has been a symbol to them for Spirit. So, to-night, we light our fire in grateful remembrance of the Great Spirit who gave you to us."

In a few clear-cut sentences Mrs. Royall spoke of the Camp Fire symbolism--of fire as the living, renewing, all-pervading element--"Our brother the fire, bright and pleasant, and very mighty and strong," as being the underlying spirit--the heart of this new order of the girls of America, as the hearth-fire is the heart of the home. She spoke of the brown chevron with the crossed sticks, the symbol of the Wood Gatherer, the blue and orange symbol of the Fire Maker, and the complete insignia combining both of these with the touch of white representing smoke from the flame, worn by the Torch Bearer, trying to make clear and vivid the beautiful meaning of it all.

When the roll-call was read, each girl, as she answered to her name, gave also the number of honours she had earned since the last meeting. It was then that Laura, watching the absorbed faces, shook her head with a sigh as her eyes met Anne's; and Anne nodded with quick understanding.

"Yes," she whispered, "there is some rivalry. It isn't all love and harmony--yet. But we are working that way all the time."

There was a report of the last Council, written in rather limping rhyme, and then each girl told of some kind or gentle deed she had seen or heard of since the last meeting--things ranging all the way from hunting for a lost glove to going for the doctor at midnight when a girl was taken suddenly ill in camp. Only one had no kindness to tell. And when she reported "Nothing" it was as if a shadow fell for a moment over all the young faces turned towards her.

"Who is that? Her voice sounds so unhappy!" Laura said, and her friend answered, "I'll tell you about her afterwards. Her name is Olga Priest. There's a new member to be received to-night. Here she comes."

Laura watched the new member as she stepped out of the circle, and crossed over to the Chief Guardian.

[Illustration: "Soon the flames began to blaze and crackle, filling the air with a spicy fragrance"]

"What is your desire?" Mrs. Royall asked, and the girl answered,

"I desire to become a Camp Fire Girl and to obey the law of the Camp Fire, which is to

"Seek beauty, Give service, Pursue knowledge, Hold on to health, Glorify work, Be happy.'

This law of the Camp Fire I will strive to follow."

Slowly and impressively, Mrs. Royall explained to her the law, phrase by phrase, and as she ceased speaking, the candidate repeated her promise to keep it, and instantly every girl in the circle, placing her right hand over her heart, chanted slowly,

"This law of the fire I will strive to follow With all the strength and endurance of my body, The power of my will, The keenness of my mind, The warmth of my heart, And the sincerity of my spirit."

And again after the last words--like a full stop in music--came the few seconds of utter silence.

It was broken by the Chief Guardian. "With this sign you become a Wood Gatherer," and she laid the fingers of her right hand across those of her left. The candidate made the same sign; then she held out her hand, and Mrs. Royall slipped on her finger the silver ring, which all Camp Fire Girls are entitled to wear, and as she did so she said,

"As fagots are brought from the forest Firmly held by the sinews which bind them, So cleave to these others, your sisters, Whenever, wherever you find them.

Be strong as the fagots are sturdy; Be pure in your deepest desire; Be true to the truth that is in you; And--follow the law of the fire."

The girl returned to her place in the circle, and at a sign from Anne Wentworth, four of her girls followed her as she moved forward and stood before Mrs. Royall. From a paper in her hand she read the names of the four girls, and declared that they had all met the tests for the second grade.

The Chief Guardian turned to the four.

"What is your desire?" she asked, and together they repeated,

"As fuel is brought to the fire So I purpose to bring My strength, My ambition, My heart's desire, My joy, And my sorrow To the fire Of humankind. For I will tend As my fathers have tended, And my father's fathers Since time began, The fire that is called The love of man for man, The love of man for God."

As the young earnest voices repeated the beautiful words, Laura Haven's heart thrilled again with the solemn beauty of it all, and tears crowded to her eyes in the silence that followed--a silence broken only by the whispering of the night wind high in the treetops.

Then Mrs. Royall lifted her hand and soft and low the young voices chanted,

"Lay me to sleep in sheltering flame, O Master of the Hidden Fire; Wash pure my heart, and cleanse for me My soul's desire.

In flame of service bathe my mind, O Master of the Hidden Fire, That when I wake clear-eyed may be My soul's desire."

It was over, and the circle broke again into laughing, chattering groups. Lanterns were lighted, every spark of the Council Fire carefully extinguished, and then back through the woods the procession wound, laughing, talking, sometimes breaking into snatches of song, the lanterns throwing strange wavering patches of light into the dense darkness of the woods on either side.

II

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

"You did enjoy it, didn't you?" Anne said as the two walked back through the woods-path to camp.

"I loved every bit of it," was the enthusiastic response. "It's so different from anything else--so fresh and picturesque and full of interest! I should think girls would be wild to belong."

"They are. Camp Fires are being organised all over the country. The trouble is that there are not yet enough older girls trained for Guardians."

"Where can they get the training?"

"In New York there is a regular training class, and there will soon be others in other cities," Anne returned, and then, with a laugh, "I believe you've caught the fever already, Laura."

"I have--hard. You know, Anne, all the time we were abroad I was trying to decide what kind of work I could take up, among girls, and this appeals to me as nothing else has done. It seems to me there are great possibilities in it. I'd like to be a Guardian. Do you think I'm fit?"

"Of course you're fit, dear. O Laura, I'm so glad. We can work together when we go home."

"But, Anne, I want to stay right here in this camp now. Do you suppose Mrs. Royall will be willing? Of course I'll pay anything she says----"

"She'll be delighted. She needs more helpers, and I can teach you all I learned before I took charge of my girls. But will your father be willing?"

"I'm sure he will. He knows you, and everybody in Washington knows and honours Mrs. Royall. Father is going to Alaska on a business trip and I've been trying to decide where I would stay while he is gone. This will solve my problem beautifully."

"Come then--we'll see Mrs. Royall right now and arrange it," Anne returned, turning back.

Mrs. Royall was more than willing to accede to Laura's proposal. "Stay at the camp as long as you like," she said, "and if you really want to be a Guardian, I will send your name to the Board which has the appointing power."

"She is lovely, isn't she?" Laura said as they left the Chief Guardian. "I don't wonder you call her the Camp Mother."

Something in the tone reminded Anne that her friend had long been motherless, and she slipped her arm affectionately around Laura's waist

as she answered, "She is the most motherly woman I ever met. She seems to have room in her big, warm heart for every girl that wants mothering, no matter who or what she is." They were back at the camp now, and she added, "But we must get to bed quickly--there's the curfew," as a bugle sounded a few clear notes.

"O dear, I've a hundred and one questions to ask you," sighed Laura.

"They'll keep till morning," replied the other. "It's so hard for the girls to stop chattering after the curfew sounds! We Guardians have to set them a good example."

The cots in the sleeping tents were placed on wooden platforms raised three or four inches from the ground, and on clear nights the sides of the tents were rolled up. Laura, too interested and excited to sleep at once, lay in her cot looking out across the open space now flooded with light from the late-risen moon, and thought of the girls sleeping around her. Herself an only child, she had a great desire--almost a passion--for girls; girls who were lonely like herself--girls who had to struggle with ill-health, poverty, and hard work as she did not.

Suddenly she started up in bed, her eyes wide with half-startled surprise. Reaching over to the adjoining cot, she touched her friend, whispering, "Anne, Anne, look!" and as Anne opened drowsy eyes, Laura pointed to the moonlit space.

Anne stared for a moment, then she laughed softly and whispered back, "It's a ghost dance, Laura. Some of those irrepressible girls couldn't resist this moonlight. They're doing an Indian folk dance."

"Isn't it weird--in the moonlight and in utter silence!" Laura said under her breath. "I should think somebody would giggle and spoil the effect."

"That would be a signal for Mrs. Royall to 'discover' them and send them back to bed," Anne returned. "So long as they do it in utter silence so as to disturb no one else, the Guardians wink at it. It is pretty, isn't it?"

"Lovely!"

Anne turned over and went to sleep again, but Laura watched the slender graceful figures in their loose white garments till suddenly they melted into the shadows and were gone. Then she too slept till a shaft of sunlight, touching her eyelids, awakened her to a new day. She looked across at her friend, who smiled back at her. "I feel so well and so happy!" she exclaimed.

"It is sleeping in the open air," Anne replied. "Almost everybody wakes happy here--except the Problem."

"The Problem?" Laura echoed.

"I mean Olga Priest, the girl you asked about last night. We Guardians call her the Problem because no one has yet been able to do anything for her."

"Tell me about her," Laura begged, as, dropping the sides of the tent, Anne began to dress.

"Wait till we are outside--there are too many sharp young ears about us here," Anne cautioned. "There'll be time for a walk or a row before breakfast and we can talk then."

"Good--let's have a walk," Laura said, and made quick work of her dressing.

"Now tell me about the Problem," she urged, when they were seated on a rocky point overlooking the blue waters of the bay.

"Poor Olga," Anne said. "I wonder sometimes if she has ever had a really happy day in the eighteen years of her life. Her mother was a Russian of

good family and well educated. She married an American who made life bitter for her until he drank himself to death. There were three children older than Olga--two sons who went to the bad, following their father's example. The older girl married a worthless fellow and disappeared, and there was no one left but Olga to support the sick mother and herself, and Olga was only thirteen then! She supported them, somehow, but of course she had to leave her mother alone all day, and one night when she went home she found her gone. She had died all alone."

"O!" cried Laura.

"Yes, it was pitiful. I suppose the child was as nearly heartbroken as any one could be, for her mother was everything to her. Of course there were many who would have been glad to help had they known, but Olga's pride is something terrible, and it seems as if she hates everybody because her father and her brothers and sister neglected her mother, and she was left to die alone. I don't believe there is a single person in the world whom she likes even a little."

"O, the poor thing!" sighed Laura. "Not even Mrs. Royall?"

"No, not even Mrs. Royall, who has been heavenly kind to her."

"Is she in your Camp Fire?"

"No, Ellen Grandis is her Guardian, but Ellen is to be married next month and will live in New York, so that Camp Fire will have to have a new Guardian."

"What about the other girls in it?"

"All but three are working girls--salesgirls in stores, I think, most of them."

"How did Olga happen to join the Camp Fire?"

"I don't know. I've wondered about that myself. She doesn't make friends with any of the girls, nor join in any of the games; but work--she has a perfect passion for work, and it seems as if she can do anything. She has won twice as many honours as any other girl since she came, but she cares nothing for them--except to win them."

"She must be a strange character, but she interests me," Laura said thoughtfully. "Anne, maybe I can take Miss Grandis' place when she leaves."

Anne gave her friend a searching look. "Are you sure you would like it? Wouldn't you rather have a different class of girls?" she asked.

Laura answered gravely, "I want the girls I can help most--those that need me most--and from what you say, I should think Olga needed--some one--as much as any girl could."

"As much perhaps, but hardly more than some of the others. There's that little Annie Pearson who thinks of nothing but her pretty face and 'good times,' and Myra Karr who is afraid of her own shadow and always clinging to the person she happens to be with. The Camp Fire is a splendid organisation, Laura, and it will do a deal for the girls, but still almost every one of them is some sort of 'problem' that we have to study and watch and labour over with heart and head and hands if we hope really to accomplish any permanent good. But come, we must go back or we shall be late for breakfast."

"Then let's hurry, for this air has given me a famous appetite," Laura replied. But she did not find it easy to keep up with her friend's steady stride.

"You'll have to get in training for tramps if you are going to be a Camp Fire Girl," Anne taunted gaily.

Laura's eyes brightened as she entered the big dining-room with its canvas sides rolled high.

"Just in time," Anne said, as she pulled out a chair for Laura and slipped into the next one herself.

The meal was cheerful, almost hilarious. "Mrs. Royall believes in laughter. She never checks the girls unless it's really necessary," Anne explained under cover of the merry chatter. "She----"

But Laura interrupted her. "O Anne, that must be Olga--the dark still girl, at the end of the next table, isn't it?"

"Yes, and Myra Karr is next to her. All at that table belong to the Busy Corner Camp Fire."

After breakfast Laura again paddled off to the yacht with Anne. It did not require much coaxing to secure her father's permission for her to spend a month at the camp with Anne Wentworth and Mrs. Royall. He kept the girls on the yacht for luncheon, and after that they went back to camp, a couple of sailors following in another boat with Laura's luggage.

"How still it is--I don't hear a sound," Laura said wonderingly, as she and her friend approached the camp through the pines.

Anne listened, looking a little perplexed, as they came out into the camp and found it quite deserted--not a girl anywhere in sight.

"I'll go and find out where everybody is," she said. "I see some one moving in the kitchen. The cook must be there."

She came back laughing. "They've all gone berrying. That's one of the charms of this camp--the spontaneous fashion in which things are done. Probably some one said, 'There are blueberries over yonder--loads of them,' and somebody else exclaimed, 'Let's go get some,' and behold"--she waved her hand--"a deserted camp."

III

THE CAMP COWARD DARES

Each girl at the camp was expected to make her own bed and keep her belongings in order. Each one also served her turn in setting tables, washing dishes, etc. Beyond this there were no obligatory tasks, but all the girls were working for honours, and most of them were trying to meet the requirements for higher rank. Some were making their official dresses. Girls who were skilful with the needle could secure beautiful and effective results with silks and beads, and of course every girl wanted a headband of beadwork and a necklace--all except Olga Priest. Olga was working on a basket of raffia, making it from a design of her own, when Ellen Grandis, her Guardian, came to her just after Anne Wentworth and Laura had left the camp.

"I've come to ask your help, Olga," Miss Grandis began.

The girl dropped the basket in her lap, and waited.

Miss Grandis went on, "It is something that will require much patience and kindness----"

"Then you'd better ask some one else, Miss Grandis. You know that I do not pretend to be kind," Olga interrupted, not rudely but with finality.

"But you are very patient and persevering, and--I don't know why, but I have a feeling that you could do more for this one girl than any one else here could. She is coming to take the only vacant place in our Camp Fire. Shall I tell you about her, Olga?"

"If you like." The girl's tone was politely indifferent.

With a little sigh Miss Grandis went on, "Her name is Elizabeth Page. She is about a year younger than you, and she has had a very hard life."

Olga's lips tightened and a shadow swept across her dark eyes.

Miss Grandis continued, "You have superb health--this girl has perhaps never been really well for a single day. You have a brain and hands that enable you to accomplish almost what you will. Poor Elizabeth can do so few things well that she has no confidence in herself: yet I believe she might do many things if only she could be made to believe in herself a little. She needs--O, everything that the Camp Fire can do for a girl. Olga, won't you help us to help her?"

"How can I?" There was no trace of sympathy in the cold voice, and suddenly the eager hopefulness faded out of Miss Grandis' face.

"How can you indeed, if you do not care. I am afraid I made a mistake in coming to you, after all," she said sadly. "I'm sorry, Olga--sorry even more on your account than on Elizabeth's."

With that she rose and went away, and Olga looked after her thoughtfully for a moment before she took up her work again.

A little later Myra Karr stood looking down at her with a curious expression in her wide blue eyes.

"I'm--I'm going to walk to Kent's Corners," she announced, with a little nervous catch in her voice.

"Well, what of it? You've been there before, haven't you?" Olga retorted.

"Yes, but this time I'm going all *alone*!"

Olga's only reply was a swift mocking smile.

"I *am*--Olga Priest!" repeated Myra, stamping her foot angrily. "You all think me a coward--I'll just show you!" and with that she whirled around and marched off, her chin up and her cheeks flushed.

As she passed a group of girls busy over beadwork, one of them called out, "What's the matter, Bunny?"

Myra paused and faced them. "I'm going to walk to Kent's Corners *alone*!" she cried defiantly.

A shout of incredulous laughter greeted that.

"Better give it up before you start, Bunny," said one.

Another, with a mischievous laugh, whisked out her handkerchief and in a flash had twisted it into a rabbit with flopping ears. "Bunny, bunny, bunny!" she called, making the rabbit hop across her lap.

Myra's blue eyes filled with angry tears. "You're horrid, Louise Johnson!" she cried out. "You're *all* horrid. But I'll show you!" and with a glance that swept the whole laughing group, she threw back her head and marched on.

The girls looked after her and then at each other.

"Believe she'll really do it?" one questioned doubtfully.

"Not she. Maybe she'll get as far as the village," replied another.

"She'd never dare pass Slabtown alone--never in the world," a third declared with decision.

"Poor Myra, I'm sorry for her. It must be awful to be scared at everything as she is!" This from Mary Hastings, a big blonde who did not know what fear was.

"Bunny certainly is the scariest girl in this camp," laughed Louise Johnson carelessly. "She's afraid of her own shadow."

"Then she ought to have more credit than the rest of us when she does do a brave thing," put in little Bess Carroll in her gentle way.

"We'll give her credit all right *if* she goes to Kent's Corners," retorted Louise.

Just then another girl ran up to the group and announced that a blueberry picnic had been arranged. Somebody had discovered a pasture where the bushes were loaded with luscious fruit. They would carry lunch, and bring back enough for a regular blueberry festival.

"All who want to go, get baskets or pails and come on," the girl ended.

In an instant the others were on their feet, work thrown aside, and five minutes later there was no one but the cook left in the camp.

[Illustration: A group of girls busy over beadwork]

By that time Myra Karr was tramping steadily on towards Kent's Corners. Scarcely another girl in the camp would have minded that walk, but never before had she dared to take it alone; now in spite of her nervous fears, she felt a little thrill of incredulous pride in herself. So many times she had planned to do this thing, but always before her courage had failed. Now, now she was really doing it! And if she went all the way perhaps--O, perhaps the girls would stop calling her Bunny. How she hated that name! She hurried on, her heart beating hard, her hands tight-clenched, her eyes fearfully searching the long sunny road before her and the woods or fields that bordered it. It was not so bad the first part of the way--the mile and a half to the little village of East Bassett. To be sure, she had never before been even that far alone, but she had been many times with other girls. She passed slowly and lingeringly through the village. Should she turn back now? Before her flashed the face of Olga with that little cold mocking smile, and she saw again Louise Johnson hopping her handkerchief rabbit across her lap. The incredulous laughter with which the others had greeted her announcement rang still in her ears. She was walking very very slowly, but--but no, she wouldn't--she *couldn't* turn back. She forced her unwilling feet to go

on--to go faster, faster until she was almost running. She was beyond the village now and another mile and a half would bring her to Slabtown. *Slabtown!* She had forgotten Slabtown. The colour died swiftly out of her face as she remembered it now. Even with a crowd of girls she had never passed the place without a fearful shrinking, and now alone--*could* she pass those ugly cabins swarming with rough, dirty men and slovenly women and rude, staring children? Her knees trembled under her even at the thought, and her newborn courage melted like wax. It was no use. She could not do it. She wavered, stopped, and turned slowly around. As she did so a grey rabbit with a white tail scurried across the road before her, his ears flattened against his head and his eyes bulging with terror. The sight of him suddenly steadied the girl. She stood still looking after the tiny grey streak flying across a wide green pasture, and a queer crooked smile was on her trembling lips.

"A bunny--*another* bunny," she said under her breath, "and just as scared as I am--at nothing. I won't be a bunny any longer! I won't be the camp coward--I won't, won't, *won't!*" she cried aloud, and turning, went on again swiftly with her head lifted. A bit of colour drifted back to her white cheeks, and her heart stopped its heavy thumping as she drew a long deep breath. She would not let herself think of Slabtown. She counted the trees she passed, named the birds that wheeled and circled about her, even repeated the multiplication table--anything to keep Slabtown out of her thoughts; but all the while the black dread of it was there in the back of her mind. When she caught sight of the sawmill where the Slabtown men earned their bread, her feet began to drag again.

"I can't--O, I can't!" she sobbed out, two big tears rolling down her cheeks. Then across her mind flashed a vision of the little cottontail streaking madly across the road before her, and again some strange new power within urged her on. She went on slowly, reluctantly, with dragging feet, but still she went on. There were no men about the place at this hour--they were at work--but untidy women sat on their doorsteps or

rocked at the windows, and a horde of ragged barefooted children catching sight of the girl swarmed out into the road to stare at her. Some begged for pennies, and getting none, yelled after her and threw stones till she took to her heels and ran "just like the other bunny!" she told herself in miserable scorn, when once she was safely past the settlement. Well, there was no other such place to pass, but--she shivered as she remembered that she must pass this one again on the way back.

She went on swiftly now with only occasionally a fearful glance on either side when the road cut through the woods. Once a farmer going by offered her a ride; but she shook her head and plodded on. It was half-past eleven when, with a great throb of relief and joy, she came in sight of the Corners. A few minutes more and she was in the village street with its homey-looking white houses and flower gardens. She longed to stop and rest on one of the vine-shaded porches, but she was too shy to ask permission. At the store she did stop, and rested a few minutes in one of the battered wooden chairs on the little porch, but it was sunny and hot there. Now for the first time she thought of lunch, but she had not a penny with her; she must go hungry until she got back to camp. A boy came up the steps munching a red apple, his pockets bulging with others. The storekeeper's little girl ran out on the porch with a big molasses cooky just out of the oven, and the warm spicy odour of it made Myra realise how hungry she was. She looked so longingly at the cooky that the child, seeming to read her thoughts, crowded it all hastily into her own mouth. Myra laughed a bit at that, and after a little rest, set off on her return. She was tired and hungry, but a strange new joy was throbbing at her heart. She had come all the way to Kent's Corners alone--*they could not call her a coward now!* That thought more than balanced her weariness and hunger. She had to walk all the way back--she had to pass Slabtown again. Yes, but now she was not afraid--*not afraid!* She drew herself up to her slender height, threw back her head, and laughed aloud in the joy of her deliverance from the fear

that had held her in bondage all her life. She didn't understand in the least how it had happened, but she knew that at last she was free--*free*--like the other girls whom she had envied; and dimly she began to realise that this was a big thing--something that would make all her life different. She walked as if she were treading on air. The loneliness of the woods, of the long stretch of empty road, no longer filled her with trembling terror.

As for the second time she approached Slabtown, her heart began to beat a little faster, but the newborn courage did not fail her now. She found herself whistling a gay tune and laughed. Whistling to keep her courage up? Was that what she was doing? Never mind--the courage *was* up. The women still sat on their doorsteps or stared from their windows, but this time the children did not swarm around her. They stood by the roadside and stared, but none called after her or followed her. She did not realise how great was the difference between the girl who now walked by with shining eyes and lifted head, and the white-faced trembling little creature with terror writ large in every line of her face and figure that had scurried by earlier in the day. But the children realised it. Instinctively now they knew her unafraid, and they did not venture to badger her. She even smiled and waved her hand to them as she went by, and at that a youngster of a dozen years suddenly broke out, "Three cheers fer the girl--now, fellers!" And with the echo of the shrill response ringing in her ears, Myra passed on, proud and happy as never before in her life.

All the rest of the way she went with the new happy consciousness making music in her heart--the consciousness of victory won. The last mile or two her feet dragged, but it was from weariness and lack of food. As she drew near the camp her steps quickened, her head went up again, and her eyes began to shine; but when she came to the white tents, she stood looking about in blank amazement. There was not a girl anywhere in sight; even the cook was missing.

Myra stood for a moment wondering where they had all gone; then she walked slowly across the camp to a hammock swung behind a clump of low-growing pines. Dropping into the hammock, she tucked a cushion under her head and, with a long sigh of delicious content and restfulness her eyes closed and in two minutes she was sound asleep--so sound asleep that when, an hour later, the girls came straggling back with pails and baskets full of big luscious berries, the gay cries and laughter and chatter of many voices did not arouse her.

The girls trooped over to the kitchen and delivered up their spoil to the cook.

"Now, Katie," cried one, "you must make us some blueberry flapjacks for supper--lots and lots of 'em, too!"

"And blueberry gingerbread," added another.

"And pies--fat juicy pies," called a third.

"*And* rolypoly--blueberry rolypoly!" shouted yet another.

The cook, her arms on her hips, stood laughing into the sun-browned young faces before her.

"Sure ye're not askin' me to make all them things fer ye *to-night!*" she protested gaily.

"We-ell, not all maybe. We can wait till to-morrow for some of them. But heaps and heaps of flapjacks, Katie dear, if you love us, and you know you do," coaxed Louise Johnson.

"Love ye? *Love* ye, did ye say?" laughed the cook. "Be off wid ye now an' lave me in pace or ye'll not get a smirch of a flapjack to yer supper. Shoo!" and she waved them off with her apron.

As the laughing girls turned away from the kitchen, Mary Hastings came towards them from the other side of the camp.

"What's the matter, Molly? You look as sober as an owl!" cried Louise who never looked sober.

"It's Myra--she isn't here. Miss Grandis and I have hunted all over the camp for her," Mary answered. "You know she started for Kent's Corners before we went berrying."

"So she did," cried another girl, the merriment dying out of her eyes. "You don't suppose she really went there?"

"Myra Karr--alone--to Kent's Corners? Never in the world," Louise flung out carelessly. "She's somewhere about. Let's call her." She lifted her voice and called aloud, "Myra, Myra, My-raa!"

At the call Mrs. Royall came hastily towards them. "Where is Myra? Didn't she go berrying with us?" she inquired.

"No," Louise explained lightly. "Bunny got her back up this morning and said she was going alone to Kent's Corners, but of course she didn't. She's started that stunt half a dozen times and always backed out. She's just around somewhere."

But Mrs. Royall still looked troubled. "She must be found," she said with quick decision. "Get the megaphone, Louise, and call her with that."

Still laughing, Louise obeyed. Her clear voice carried well, and many keen young ears were strained for the response that did not come. In the silence that followed a second call, Mrs. Royall spoke to another girl.

"Edith, get your bugle and sound the recall. If that does not bring her, two of you must hurry over to the farm and harness Billy into the buggy; and I will drive to Kent's Corners at once."

The girls were no longer laughing. "You don't think anything could have happened to Myra, Mrs. Royall?" one of them questioned anxiously. "Almost all of us have walked over there. I went alone and so did Mary."

"I know, but Myra is such a timid little thing. She cannot do what most of you can."

Edith Rue came running back with her bugle, and in a moment the notes of the recall floated out on the still summer air. It was a rigid rule of the camp that the recall should be promptly answered by any girl within hearing, so when, in the silence that followed, no response was heard, Mrs. Royall sent the two girls for the horse and buggy.

"Have them here as quickly as possible," she called after them.

Before the messengers were out of sight, however, there was an outcry behind them.

"Why, there she is! There's Myra now!" and every face turned towards the small figure coming from the clump of evergreens, her eyes still half-dazed with sleep.

With an exclamation of relief, Mrs. Royall hurried to meet her.

"Where were you, child? Didn't you hear us calling you?" she asked.

"I--I--no. I heard the recall, and I came--I guess I was asleep," stammered Myra bewildered by something tense in the atmosphere, and the eyes all centred on her.

"Asleep!" echoed Louise Johnson with a chuckle. "What did I tell you, girls?"

But Mrs. Royall saw that Myra looked pale and tired, and she noticed the change that came over her face as Louise spoke. A quick wave of colour swept the pale cheeks and the small head was lifted with an air that was new and strange--in Myra Karr. Mrs. Royall spoke again, laying her hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

"Myra, how long have you been asleep? How long have you been back in camp?"

And Myra answered quietly, but with that new pride in her voice, "It was quarter of four by the kitchen clock when I came. There was nobody here--not even Katie----"

"I'd just run out a bit to see if anny of ye was comin'," put in the cook from the kitchen door where she stood, as much interested as any one else in what was going on.

"And did you go to Kent's Corners, my dear?" Mrs. Royall questioned gently.

It was Myra's hour of triumph. She forgot Louise Johnson's mocking laugh--forgot everything but her beautiful new freedom.

"O, I did--I did, Mrs. Royall!" she cried out. "I was awfully frightened at first, but coming home I wasn't *one bit afraid*, and, please, you won't let them call me Bunny any more, will you?"

"No, my child, no. You've won a new name and you shall have it at the next Council Fire. I'm so glad, Myra!" Mrs. Royall's face was almost as radiant as the girl's.

It was Louise Johnson who called out, "Three cheers for Myra Karr! She's a *trump!*"

The cheers were given with a will. Tears filled Myra's eyes, but they were happy tears, as the girls crowded around her with questions and exclamations, and Miss Grandis stood with a hand on her shoulder.

"That's what Camp Fire has done for one girl," Mrs. Royall said in a low tone to Laura Haven. "That child was afraid of the dark, afraid of the water, afraid to be alone a minute, when she came. It is a great triumph for her--a great victory."

"Yes," returned Laura thoughtfully, and Anne added,

"You've no idea how lonesome the camp looked when Laura and I came back and found you all gone. It was so still it seemed almost uncanny. Myra never would have dared to stay alone here before."

IV

THE POOR THING

A week later Miss Grandis was called home by illness in her family, and she asked Laura to drive to the station with her.

"I wanted the chance to talk with you," she explained, as they drove along the quiet country road. "You know I should not have been able to stay here much longer anyhow, and now I shall not come back, and I want you to take charge of my girls. Will you?"

"O, I can't yet--I haven't had half enough training," Laura protested.

"I know, but you've put so much into the time you have had in camp, and I know that Mrs. Royall will be glad to have you in my place. You can keep on with your training just the same. I want to tell you about the girls." She told something of the environment of each one--enough to help Laura to understand their needs. "And there's Elizabeth Page, who is coming to-morrow," she went on. "I always think of her as the Poor Thing. O, I do so hope the Camp Fire will do a great deal for her--she's had so pitifully little in her life thus far. Her mother died when she was a baby, and she has been just a drudge for her stepmother and the younger children, and she's not strong enough for such hard work. She's never had anything for herself. The camp will seem like paradise to her if she can only get in touch with things--I'm sure it will."

"I'll do my best for her," Laura promised.

"I know you will. And you'll meet her when she comes, to-morrow?"

"Of course," Laura returned.

There was no time to spare when they reached the station, but Miss Grandis' last word was of Elizabeth and her great need.

Laura was at the station early the next day, and would have recognised the Poor Thing even if she had not been the only girl leaving the train at that place. Elizabeth was seventeen, but she might have been taken for fourteen until one looked into her eyes--they seemed to mirror the pain and privation of half a century. Laura's heart went out to her in a wave of pitying tenderness, but the girl drew back as if frightened by the warm friendliness of her greeting.

All the way back to camp she sat silent, answering a direct question with a nod or shake of the head, but never speaking; and when, at the camp, a crowd of girls came to meet the newcomer, she looked wildly around as if for refuge from all these strangers. Seeing this, Laura, with a whispered word, sent the girls away, and introduced Elizabeth only to Mrs. Royall and Anne Wentworth.

"Another scared rabbit?" giggled Louise Johnson.

"Don't call her that, Louise," said Bessie Carroll. "I'm awfully sorry for the poor thing."

Laura, overhearing the low-spoken words, said to herself, "There it is--Poor Thing. That name is bound to cling to her, it fits so exactly."

It did fit exactly, and within two days Elizabeth was the Poor Thing to every girl in the camp. Laura kept the child with her most of the first day; she was quiet and still as a ghost, did as she was told, and watched all that went on, but she spoke to no one and never asked a question. At night she was given a cot next to Olga's. When Laura showed her her place at bedtime, she pointed to the adjoining tent.

"I sleep right there, Elizabeth," she said, "and if you want anything in the night, just speak, and I shall hear you. But I hope you will sleep so soundly that you won't know anything till morning. It's lovely sleeping out of doors like this!"

Elizabeth said nothing, but she shivered as she cast a fearful glance into the shadowy spaces beyond the tents, and Laura hastened to add, "You needn't be a bit afraid. Nothing but birds and squirrels ever come around here."

Elizabeth went early to bed, and was apparently sound asleep when the other girls went to their cots. But after all was still and the camp lights out, she lay trembling, and staring wide-eyed into the darkness. A thousand strange small sounds beat on her strained ears, and when suddenly the hoot of an owl rang out from a nearby treetop, Elizabeth sprang up with a frightened cry and clutched wildly at the girl in the nearest cot.

Olga's cold voice answered her cry. "It's nothing but an owl, you goose! Go back to your bed!"

But Elizabeth was on her knees, clinging desperately to Olga's hand.

"O, I'm afraid, I'm afraid!" she moaned. "Please *please* let me stay here with you. I never was in a p-place like this before."

Olga jerked her hand away from the clinging fingers. "Get back to your bed!" she ordered under her breath. "Anybody'd think you were a *baby*."

"I don't care *what* anybody'd think if you'll only let me stay. I--I must touch s-somebody," wailed the Poor Thing in a choked voice.

"Well, it won't be me you'll touch," retorted Olga. "And if you don't keep still I'll report you in the morning. You'll have every girl in the camp awake presently."

"O, I don't care," sobbed Elizabeth under her breath. "I--I want to go home. I'd rather die than stay here!"

"Well, die if you like, but leave the rest of us to sleep in peace," muttered Olga, and turning her face away from the wretched little creature crouching at her side, she went calmly to sleep.

When she awoke she gave a casual glance at the next cot. It was empty, but on the floor was a small huddled figure, one hand still clutching Olga's blanket. Olga started to yank the blanket away, but the look of suffering in the white face stayed her impatient hand. She touched the thin shoulder of Elizabeth, and for once her touch was almost gentle. Elizabeth opened her eyes with a start as Olga whispered, "Get back to your bed. There's an hour before rising time."

Elizabeth crawled slowly back to her own cot, but she did not sleep again. Neither did Olga, and she was uncomfortably aware that a pair of timid blue eyes were on her face until she turned her back on them.

At ten o'clock that morning the girls all trooped down to the water. Some in full knickerbockers and middy blouses were going to row or paddle, but most wore bathing suits. With some difficulty Laura persuaded Elizabeth to put on a bathing suit that Miss Grandis had left for her, but no urging or coaxing could induce her to go into the water even to wade, though other girls were swimming and splashing and frolicking like mermaids. Elizabeth sat on the sand, her eyes following Olga's dark head as the girl swept through the water like a fish--swimming, floating, diving--she seemed as much at home in the water as on land.

"You can do all those things too, Elizabeth, if you will," Laura told her. "Look at Myra, there--she has always been afraid to try to swim, but she's learning to-day, and see how she is enjoying it."

Elizabeth drew further into her shell of silence. She cast a fleeting glance at Myra Karr, nervously trying to obey Mary Hastings' directions and "act like a frog"--then her eyes searched again for Olga, now far out in the bay.

When she could not distinguish the dark head, anxiety at last conquered her timidity, and she turned to Laura:

"O, is she drowned?" she cried under her breath. "Olga--is she?"

Anne Wentworth laughed out at the question. "Why, Elizabeth," she said, leaning towards her, "Olga's a perfect fish in the water. She's the best swimmer in camp. Look--there she comes now."

She came swimming on her side, one strong brown arm cutting swiftly and steadily through the water. When presently she walked up on the beach, a pale smile glimmered over Elizabeth's face, but it vanished at Olga's glance as she passed with the scornful fling--"Haven't even wet your feet--*baby!*"

Elizabeth's face flushed and she drew her bare feet under her.

"Never mind, you'll wet them to-morrow, won't you, Elizabeth?" Laura said; but the Poor Thing made no reply; she only gulped down a sob as she looked after the straight young figure in the dripping bathing suit marching down the beach.

"She notices no one but Olga," Laura said as she walked back to camp with her friend. "If Olga would only take an interest in *her!*"

"If only she would!" Anne agreed. "But she seems to have no more feeling than a fish!"

Many of the girls did their best to draw the Poor Thing out of her shell of scared silence, but they all failed. And Olga would do nothing. Yet Elizabeth followed Olga like her shadow day after day. Olga's impatient rebuffs--even her angry commands--only made the Poor Thing hang back a little.

When things had gone on so for a week, Laura asked Olga to go with her to the village. She went, but they were no sooner on the road than she

began abruptly, "I know what you want of me, Miss Haven, but it's no use. I can't be bothered with that Poor Thing--she makes me sick--always hanging around and wanting to get her hands on me. I can't stand that sort of thing, and I won't--that's all there is about it. I'll go home first."

When Laura answered nothing, Olga glanced at her grave face and went on sulkily, "Nobody ought to expect me to put up with an everlasting trailer like that girl."

Still Laura was silent until Olga flung out, "You might as well say it. I know what you are thinking of me."

"I wasn't thinking of you, Olga. I was thinking of Elizabeth. If you saw her drowning you'd plunge in and save her without a moment's hesitation."

"Of course I would--but I wouldn't have her hanging on to me like a leech after I'd saved her."

"I suppose you have not realised that in 'hanging on' to you--as you express it--she is simply fighting for her life."

"What do you mean, Miss Haven?"

"I mean that Elizabeth is--starving. Not food starvation, but a worse kind. Olga, this is the first time in her life that she has ever spent a day away from home--she told me that--or ever had any one try to make her happy. Is it any wonder that she doesn't know how to *be* happy or make friends? It seems strange that, from among so many who would gladly be her friends here, she should have chosen you who are not willing to be a friend to any one--strange, and a great pity, it seems. It throws an immense responsibility upon you."

"I don't want any such responsibility. I don't think any of you ought to put it on me," Olga flung out sulkily.

"We are not putting it on you," returned Laura gently.

Olga twitched her shoulder with an impatient gesture, and the two walked some distance before she spoke again. Then it was to say, "What are you asking me to do, anyhow?"

"I am not asking you to do anything," Laura answered. "It is for you to ask yourself what you are going to do. I believe it is in your power to make over that poor girl mind and body--I might almost say, soul too. She thinks she can do nothing but household drudgery. She is afraid of everything. When I think of what you could do for her in the next month--Olga, I wonder that you can let such a wonderful opportunity pass you by."

They went the rest of the way mostly in silence. When they returned to the camp, Elizabeth was watching for them, but the glance Olga gave her was so repellent that she shrank away, and went off alone to the Lookout. Later Laura tried to interest Elizabeth in the making of a headband of beadwork, but though she evidently liked to handle the bright-coloured beads, she would not try to do the work herself.

"I can't. I can't do things like that," she said with gentle indifference, her eyes wandering off in search of Olga.

The next day, however, Laura came to Anne Wentworth, her eyes shining. "O Anne, what *do* you think?" she cried. "Olga had Elizabeth in wading this morning. Isn't that fine?"

"Fine indeed--for a beginning. It shows what Olga might do with her if she would."

"Yes, for she was so cross with her! I wondered that Elizabeth did not go away and leave her. No other girl in camp would let Olga speak to her as she speaks to that Poor Thing."

"No, the others are not Poor Things, you see--that makes all the difference. But that Olga should take the trouble to make Elizabeth do anything is a big step in advance--for Olga."

"There is splendid material in Olga, Anne--I am sure of it," Laura returned.

There was splendid persistence in her, anyhow. She had undertaken to overcome Elizabeth's fear of the water, but it was a harder task than she had imagined. She did make the Poor Thing wade--clinging tightly to Olga's fingers all the time--but further than that she could not lead her. Day after day Elizabeth would stand shivering and trembling in water up to her knees, her cheeks so white and her lips so blue that Olga dared not compel her to go further. Yet day after day Olga made her wade in that far at least; not once would she allow her to omit it.

One day she sat for a long time looking gravely at the Poor Thing, who flushed and paled nervously under that steady silent scrutiny. At last Olga said abruptly, "What do you like best, Elizabeth?"

"Like--best----" Elizabeth faltered uncertainly.

Olga frowned and repeated her question.

Elizabeth shook her head slowly. "I--I like Molly. And the other children--a little."

"You mean your brothers and sisters?"

Elizabeth nodded.

"Which is Molly?"

"The littlest one. She's four, and she's real pretty," Elizabeth declared proudly. "She's prettier than Annie Pearson."

"Yes, but what do you yourself like?" Olga persisted. "What would you like to have--pretty dresses, ribbons--what?"

"I--I never thought," was the vague reply.

Again Olga's brows met in a frown that made the Poor Thing shrink and tremble. She brought out her necklace and tossed it into the other girl's lap.

"Think that's pretty?" she asked.

"O *yes*!" Elizabeth breathed softly. She did not touch the necklace, but gazed admiringly at the bright-coloured beads as they lay in her lap.

"You can have one like it if you want," Olga told her.

"O no! Who'd give me one?"

"Nobody. But you can get it for yourself. See here--I got all those blue beads by learning about the wild flowers that grow right around here, the weeds and stones and animals and birds. You can get as many in a few days. I got that green one for making a little bit of a basket, that--for making my washstand there out of a soap box--that, for trimming my hat. Every bead on that necklace is there because of some little thing I did or made--all things that you can do too."

The Poor Thing shook her head. "O *no*," she stammered in her weak gentle voice, "I can't do anything. I--I ain't like other girls."

"You can be if you want to," Olga flung out at her impatiently.

"Say--what *can* you do? You can do something."

"No--nothing." The Poor Thing's blue eyes filled slowly with big tears, and she looked through them beseechingly at the other. Olga drew a long exasperated breath. She wanted to take hold of the girl's thin shoulders and shake the limpness out of her once for all.

"What did you do at home?" she demanded with harsh abruptness.

"N--nothing," Elizabeth answered with a miserable gulp.

"You did too! Of course you did something," Olga flamed. "You didn't sit and stare at Molly and the others all day the way you stare at me, did you? *What* did you do, I say?"

Elizabeth gave her a swift scared glance as she stammered, "I didn't do anything but cook and sweep and wash and iron and take care of the children--truly I didn't."

Olga's face brightened. "Good heavens--if you aren't the limit!" she shrugged. Then she sprang up and got pencil and paper. "What can you cook?" she demanded, and proceeded to put Elizabeth through a rapid-fire examination on marketing, plain cooking, washing, ironing, sweeping, bed-making, and care of babies. At last she had found some things that even the Poor Thing could do. With flying fingers she scribbled down the girl's answers. Finally she cried excitedly, "*There!* See what a goose you were to say you couldn't do anything! Why, there are lots of girls here who couldn't do half these things. Elizabeth Page, listen. You've got twelve orange beads like those," she pointed to the necklace--"already, for a beginning. That's more than I have of that colour. I don't know anything about taking care of babies, nor half what you do about cooking and marketing."

Elizabeth stared, her mouth half open, her eyes widened in incredulous wonder. "But--but," she faltered, "I guess there's some mistake. Just housework and things like that ain't anything to get beads for--are they?"

"They are *that*! I tell you Mrs. Royall will give you twelve honours and twelve yellow beads at the next Council Fire, and if you half try you can win some blue and brown and red ones too before that, and you've just *got to do it*. Do you understand?"

The other nodded, her eyes full of dumb misery. Then she began to whimper, "I--I--can't ever do things like you and the rest do," she moaned.

"Why not? You can walk, can't you?"

"W--walk?"

"Yes--*walk*! Didn't hurt you to walk to the village yesterday, did it?"

"No--but I couldn't go--alone."

"Who said anything about going alone? You'll walk to Slabtown and back with me to-morrow."

"O, I'd like that--with you," said the Poor Thing, brightening.

Olga gave an impatient sniff. Sometimes she almost hated Elizabeth--almost but not quite.

"You'll go with me to-morrow," she declared, "but next day you'll go with some other girl."

Elizabeth shrank into herself, shaking her head.

Olga eyed her sternly. "Very well--if you won't go with some other girl, you can't go with me to-morrow," she declared.

But the next day after breakfast the two set off for Slabtown. Halfway there, Elizabeth suddenly crumpled up and dropped in a limp heap by the roadside.

"What's the matter?" Olga demanded, standing over her.

Elizabeth lifted tired eyes. "I don't know. You walked so--fast," she panted.

"Fast!" echoed Olga scornfully; but she sat on a stone wall and waited until a little colour had crept back into the other girl's thin cheeks, and went at a slower pace afterwards.

"There! Do that every day for a week and you'll have one of your red beads," was her comment when they were back at camp. "And now go lie in that hammock."

When from the kitchen she brought a glass of milk and some crackers, she found Elizabeth sitting on the ground.

"Why didn't you get into the hammock as I told you?" she demanded, and the Poor Thing answered vaguely that she "thought maybe they wouldn't want" her to.

Olga poked the milk at her. "Drink it!" she ordered, "and eat those crackers," and when Elizabeth had obeyed, added, "Now get into that hammock and lie there till dinner-time," and meekly Elizabeth did so.

When, later in the day, some of the younger girls started a game of blindman's buff, Olga seized Elizabeth's hand. "Come," she said, "we're going to play too."

"O, I can't! I--I never did," cried the Poor Thing, hanging back.

"I never did either, but I'm going to now and so are you. Come!" and Elizabeth yielded to the imperative command.

The other girls stared in amazement as the two joined them. It was little Bess Carroll who smiled a welcome as Louise Johnson cried out,

"Wonders will never cease--*Olga Priest playing a game!*"

She spoke to Mary Hastings, who answered hastily, "Bless her heart--she's doing it just to get that Poor Thing to play. Let's take them right in, girls."

The girls were quick to respond. Olga was the next one caught, and when she was blinded she couldn't help catching Elizabeth, who stood still, never thinking of getting out of the way. Elizabeth didn't want the handkerchief tied over her eyes, but she submitted meekly, at a look from Olga. Half a dozen girls flung themselves in her way, and the one on whom her limp grasp fell ignored the fact that Elizabeth could not name her, and gaily held up the handkerchief to be tied over her own eyes in turn. Nobody caught Olga again. She was as quick as a flash and as slippery as an eel. Elizabeth's eyes followed her constantly, and a little glimmer of a smile touched her lips as Olga slipped safely out of reach of one catcher after another.

When she pulled Elizabeth out of the noisy merry circle, Olga glanced at the clock in the dining-room and made a swift calculation.

"Three-quarters of an hour--blindman's buff."

"We've got to play at some game every day, Elizabeth," she announced, with grim determination. She hated games, but Elizabeth must win her red beads and the red blood for which they stood. She had undertaken to make something out of this jellyfish of a girl and she did not mean to fail. That was all there was about it. So every day she led forth the reluctant Elizabeth and patiently stood over her while she blundered through a game of basket-ball, hockey, prisoner's base, or whatever the girls were playing. But Elizabeth made small progress. Always she barely stumbled through her part, helped in every way by Olga and often by other girls who helped her for Olga's sake.

It was Mary Hastings who broke out earnestly one day, looking after the two going down the road, "I say, girls, we're just a lot of selfish pigs to leave that Poor Thing on Olga's hands all the time. It must be misery to her to have Elizabeth hanging on to her as she does--a dead weight."

"Right you are! I should think she'd hate the Poor Thing--I should. I should take her down to the dock some night and drown her," said Louise Johnson with her inevitable giggle.

"I think Olga deserves all the honours there are for the way she endures that--jellyfish," said Edith Rue.

"I never saw any one thaw out the way Olga has lately though. She really deigns to speak amiably now--sometimes," Annie Pearson put in with a sniff.

"She 'deigns' to do anything under the sun that will help that Poor Thing to be a bit like other girls," cried Mary. "Olga is splendid, girls! She makes me ashamed of myself twenty times a day. Do you realise what it means? She is trying to make that Poor Thing *live*. She just exists now. O, we must help her--we must--every single one of us!"

"But how, Molly? We're willing enough to help, but we don't know how. Elizabeth turns her back on every one of us except Olga--you know she does."

"I know," Mary admitted, "but if we really try we can find ways to help."

When, compelled by Olga's unyielding determination, the Poor Thing had taken a three-mile tramp every day for a week, she began to enjoy it, and did not object when another mile was added. She was always happy when she was with Olga, but at other times--when they were not walking--her content was marred by the consciousness that Olga was not really pleased with her because she could not do so many things that the others wanted her to do--like beadwork and basketwork, and above all, swimming. But Olga was pleased with her when she went willingly on these daily tramps.

The Poor Thing seemed to find something particularly attractive about the Slabtown settlement, and liked better to go in that direction than any

other. She would often stop and watch the dirty half-naked babies playing in the bare yards; and as she watched them there would come into her face a look that Olga could not understand--Olga, who had never had a baby sister to love and cuddle.

One day when the two approached the little settlement, they saw half a dozen boys and girls walking along the top of a stone-wall that bordered the road. A baby girl--not yet three--was begging the others to help her up, but they refused.

"You can't get up here, Polly John--you're too little!" the boys shouted at her. But evidently Polly John had a will of her own, for she made such an outcry that at last her sister exclaimed, "We've got to take her up--she'll yell till we do," and to the baby she cried, "Now you hush up, Polly, an' ketch hold o' my hand."

The baby held up her hand and with a jerk she was pulled to the top of the wall, but by no means did she "hush up." She writhed and twisted and screamed, but there was a difference now--a note of pain and terror in the shrill cries.

"What ails her? What's she yellin' for now?" one boy demanded, and another shouted, "Take her down, Peggy. You get down with her."

"I won't, either!" Peggy retorted angrily, but she was sitting on the wall now, holding the baby half impatiently, half anxiously.

"Look at her arm. What makes her stick it out like that?" one boy questioned.

The big sister took hold of the small arm, but at her touch the baby's cries redoubled, and a woman put her head out of a window and sharply demanded what they were doing to that child anyhow.

It was then that the Poor Thing suddenly darted across the road and caught the wailing child from the arms of her astonished sister.

"O, don't touch her arm!" Elizabeth cried. "Don't you see? It's hurting her dreadfully. You slipped it out of joint when you pulled her up there."

"I didn't, either! Much you know about it!" the older girl flashed back, sticking out her tongue. But the fear in her eyes belied her impudence.

"Where's her mother?" Elizabeth demanded.

"She ain't got none," chorused all the children.

Several women now came hurrying out to see what was the matter. One of them held out her arms to the child, but she hid her face on Elizabeth's shoulder, and still kept up her frightened wailing.

"How d'ye know her arm's out o' joint?" one of the women demanded when Peggy had repeated what Elizabeth had said.

"I do know because I pulled my little sister's arm out just that way once, lifting her over a crossing. O, I *wish* I knew how to slip it in again! It wouldn't take a minute if we only knew how. Now we must get her to a doctor--quick. It is hurting her dreadfully, you know--that's why she keeps crying so!"

"A doctor! Ain't no doctor nearer'n East Bassett," one woman said.

"East Bassett! Then we must take her there," Elizabeth said to Olga, who for once stood by silent and helpless.

"We can get her there in twenty minutes--maybe fifteen if we walk fast," she said.

"Then"--Elizabeth questioned the women--"can any of you take her there?"

The women exchanged glances. "It's 'most dinner time--my man will be home," said one. The others all had excuses; no one offered to take the

child to East Bassett. No one really believed in the necessity. What did this white-faced slip of a girl know about children, anyhow?

"Then I'll take her myself," the Poor Thing declared. "I guess I can carry her that far."

"An' who'll bring her back?" demanded the child's sister gloomily.

"You must come with me and bring her back," Elizabeth answered with decision. "Come quick! I tell you it's hurting her awfully. Don't you see how white she is?"

Peggy looked at the little face all white and drawn with pain, and surrendered.

"I'll go," she said meekly, and without more words, Elizabeth set off with the child in her arms. Olga followed in silence, and Peggy trailed along in the rear, but as she went she turned and shouted back to one of the boys, "Jimmy, you come along too with the wagon to bring her home in," and presently a freckled-faced boy, with straw-coloured hair, had joined the procession. The wagon he drew was a soapbox fitted with a pair of wheels from a go-cart.

"Let me carry her, Elizabeth--she's too heavy for you," Olga said after a few minutes; but the child clung to Elizabeth, refusing to be transferred, and at the pressure of the little yellow head against her shoulder, Elizabeth smiled.

"I can carry her," she said. "She's not so very heavy. She makes me think of little Molly."

So Elizabeth carried the child all the way, and held her still when they reached East Bassett and by rare good luck found the doctor at home. He was an old man, and over his glasses he looked up with a twinkle of amusement as the party of five trailed into his office. But the next instant he demanded abruptly,

"What ails that child?"

"It's her arm--see?" Elizabeth said. "It's out of joint."

"Yes!" The doctor snapped out the word. Then his hands were on the baby's shoulder, there was a quick skilful twist, a shriek of pain and terror from the baby, and the bone slipped into place.

"There, that's all right. She's crying now only because she's frightened," the doctor said, snapping his fingers at the child. "How did it happen?"

Elizabeth explained.

"Well, I guess you'll know better than to lift a baby by the arm another time," the doctor said, with a kindly smile into Elizabeth's tired face. "Is it your sister?"

"No--hers." Elizabeth indicated Peggy, who twisted her bare feet nervously one over the other as the doctor looked her over. "They live at Slabtown," Elizabeth added.

"O--at Slabtown. And where do you live?"

"I'm--we," Elizabeth's gesture included Olga, "we are at the camp."

"And how came you mixed up in this business?" The doctor meant to know all about the affair now. When Elizabeth had told him, he looked at her curiously. "And so you lugged that heavy child all the way down here?" he said.

"Olga wanted to carry her, but the baby wouldn't let her--and she was crying, so----" Elizabeth's voice trailed off into silence.

The doctor smiled at her again. Then suddenly he inquired in a gruff voice, "Well now, who's going to pay me for this job--you?"

"O!" cried Elizabeth, her eyes suddenly very anxious. "I--I never thought of that. It was hurting her so--and she's so little--I just thought--thought----" Again she left her sentence unfinished.

"What's her name? Who's her father?" the doctor demanded.

Peggy answered, "Father's Jim Johnson. I guess mebbe he'll pay you--sometime."

The doctor's face changed. He remembered when Jim Johnson's wife died a year before--he remembered the three children now.

"There's nothing to pay," he said kindly, "only be careful how you pull your little sister around by the arms after this. Some children can stand that sort of handling, but she can't."

"O, thank you!" Elizabeth's eyes full of gratitude were lifted to the old doctor's face as she spoke. He rose, and looking down at her, laid a kindly hand on her shoulder.

"That camp's a good place for you. Stay there as long as you can," he said. "But don't lug a three-year-old a mile and a half again. You are hardly strong enough yet for that kind of athletics."

They all filed out then, and Elizabeth put little Polly John into the soapbox wagon, kissed the small face, dirty and tear-stained as it was, and stood for a moment looking after the three children as they set off towards Slabtown.

As they went on to the camp, Olga kept glancing at Elizabeth in silent wonder. Was this really the Poor Thing who could not do anything--who would barely answer "yes" or "no" when any one spoke to her? Olga watched her in puzzled silence.

V

WIND AND WEATHER

Olga, sitting under a big oak, was embroidering her ceremonial dress, and, as usual, Elizabeth sat near, watching her as she worked. Olga did it as she did most things, with taste and skill, but she listened indifferently when Laura Haven, stopping beside her, spoke admiringly of the work.

"I wouldn't waste time over it if I hadn't promised Miss Grandis to embroider it. She gave us all the stuff, you know," Olga explained.

"It isn't wasting time to make things beautiful," Laura replied. "That is part of our law, you know, to seek beauty, and wherever possible, create it." She looked at Elizabeth and added, "You'll be learning by-and-by to do such work."

There was no response from the Poor Thing, only the usual shrinking gesture and eyes down-dropped. Acting on a sudden impulse, Laura spoke again. "Elizabeth, the cook is short of helpers this morning, and I've volunteered to shell peas. There's a big lot of them to do. I wonder if you would be willing to help me."

To her surprise Elizabeth rose at once with a nod. "Olga will be glad to have her away for a little while," Laura was thinking as they went over to the kitchen.

It certainly was a big lot of peas. Forty girls, living and sleeping in the open, develop famous appetites, and the "telephone" peas were delicious. But as the two worked, the great pile of pods grew steadily smaller, and finally Laura looked at Elizabeth with a laugh. "I've been trying my best, but I can't keep up with you," she said. "How do you shell them so fast, Elizabeth?"

A wee ghost of a smile--the first Laura had ever seen there--fluttered over the girl's face. "I'm used to this kind of work. You have to do it fast when you're cookin' for eight," she explained simply.

"And you have cooked for eight?" Laura questioned, and added to herself, "No wonder you look like a ghost of a girl."

Elizabeth nodded. Laura could not induce her to talk, but still she felt that somehow she had penetrated a little way into the shell of silence and reserve. As they went back across the camp, she dropped her arm over Elizabeth's shoulders, and said,

"You're a splendid helper, Elizabeth. May I call on you the next time I need any one?"

Another silent nod, and then the girl slipped back into her place beside Olga.

"Then I will--and thank you," Laura returned as she passed on. Olga glanced after her with something odd and inscrutable in her dark eyes, and there was a question in the look with which she searched the face of Elizabeth. But she did not put the question into words.

Afterwards Laura spoke to her friend of the Poor Thing with a new hopefulness, telling how willingly she had helped with the peas.

"You know I've tried in vain to get her to do other things, but this time she was so quick to respond! I'm almost afraid to hope, but maybe I've had an inspiration. I must try the child again though before I can feel at all sure."

She made her second trial the next day, when she sent Bessie Carroll to ask Elizabeth to help her with the dishes. "It's my day to work in the kitchen," Bessie told her, "and Miss Laura thought you might be willing to help me. Most of the girls, you know, hate the kitchen work. You don't, do you?"

"I *like* to help," replied Elizabeth promptly.

"I like Elizabeth!" Bessie confided to Laura that night. "Before, I've tried to get her into things because she seemed so lonesome and 'out of it,' don't you know? But I like her now, she was so willing to help me to-day. I thought she was awfully slow, but she was quick as anybody with the dishes."

Then Laura felt sure she had found the key. "Elizabeth loves to help," she told Anne Wentworth.

"'Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten,'" she quoted. "Anne, I believe that that spirit is in the Poor Thing--deep down in the starved little heart of her--while Olga--with Olga it is the other. She 'glorifies work' because 'through work she is free.' She works 'to win, to conquer, to be master.' She works 'for the joy of the working.' That's the difference."

Anne nodded gravely. "I am sure you are right about Olga. It has always seemed to me that to her 'Wohelo means work' and only that."

"And to Elizabeth it means--or will mean--service and that means, underneath--love," said Laura, her voice full of deep feeling. "O Anne, I so *long* to help that poor child to get some of the beauty and joy of life into her little neglected soul!"

"If she has love, she has the best thing in life already," Anne reminded. "The rest will come--in time."

A day or two later Laura found another excuse for asking Elizabeth's help, and as before, the response was quick, and again Olga's busy fingers paused as she looked after the two, and quite unconsciously her dark brows came together in a frown. Elizabeth had gone with scarcely a glance at her. A week--two weeks earlier, she would have hung back and refused. Olga shook her head impatiently as she resumed her work, and

wondered why she was dissatisfied with Elizabeth for going so willingly. Of course she must do what her Guardian asked. Nevertheless----Olga left it there.

It was an hour before Elizabeth came back, and this time there was in her face something half shy, half exultant, and she did not say a word about what Miss Laura had wanted her for. Olga made a mental note of that, but she was far too proud to make any inquiries.

The next morning after breakfast Elizabeth disappeared again, and this time too it was fully an hour before she returned, and as before she came back with a shining something in her eyes--a something that changed slowly to troubled brooding when Olga did not look at her or speak to her all the rest of the morning.

When the third day it was the same, Olga faced the situation in stony silence. She would not ask why Elizabeth went or where, but she silently resented her going, and Elizabeth, sensitively conscious of her resentment, after that, slipped away each time with a wistful backward glance; and when she returned, there was no shining radiance in her eyes, but only that wistful pleading which Olga coldly ignored. So it went on day after day. Olga always knew where Elizabeth was except for that one hour in the morning, which was never mentioned between them. The other times she was always helping some one--darning stockings for Louise Johnson--Elizabeth knew how to darn stockings--or helping little Bessie Carroll hunt for some of her belongings, which she was always losing, or helping Katie the cook, who declared that nobody in camp could pare potatoes and apples, or peel tomatoes or pick over berries so fast as the Poor Thing. There was not a day now that some one did not call on Elizabeth for something like this, for the girls had found out that she was always willing. She seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that she should be at the service of everybody. But Laura noted the fact that she never asked anybody to help her.

Then came a night when Mrs. Royall detained the girls for a moment after supper in the dining-room.

"I think we are going to have a heavy storm," she said, "and we must be prepared for it. Put all your belongings under cover where they will be secure from wind and rain. I should advise you to sleep in your gymnasium suits--you will be none too warm in this northeast wind--and have your rubber blankets and overshoes handy. Guardians will examine all tent-pins and ropes and see that everything is secure. No tent-sides up to-night, of course. I shall have a fire here, and lanterns burning all night; so if anything is needed you can come right here. Now remember, girls, there is nothing to be afraid of--and Camp Fire Girls, of course, are never afraid. That is all, but attend to these things at once, and as it is too chilly to stay out, we will all spend the evening here."

The girls scattered, and the next half-hour was spent in making everything ready for stormy weather. Only Louise Johnson, her mouth full of mint gum, gaily protested that it was all nonsense. It might rain, of course, but she didn't believe there was going to be any heavy storm--in August----

"If the rest of you want to bundle up in your gym. suits you can, but excuse *me*!" she said. "And I can't put all my duds under cover."

"All right, Johnny, you'll have nobody but yourself to blame if you find your things soaked, or blown into the bay before morning," Mary Hastings told her. "I'm going to obey orders," and she hurried over to her own tent.

The evening began merrily in the big dining-room. The canvas sides had been securely fastened down, and a splendid wood fire blazed in the wide fireplace. Tables were piled at one side of the room, and the girls played games, and danced to the music of two violins. At bedtime Mrs. Royall served hot chocolate and wafers, and then the girls went to their tents. By

that time the sky was covered with a murk of black clouds, and a penetrating wind was blowing up the bay and whistling through the grove. Extra blankets had been put over the cots and rubber blankets over all, and the girls were quite willing to pull their flannel gym. suits over their night clothes, and found them none too warm. Even Louise Johnson followed the example of the others. "Gee!" she exclaimed as she tucked the extra blanket closely around her shoulders, "camping out isn't all it's cracked up to be--not in this weather. Isn't that thunder?"

It was thunder, and some of the more timid girls heard it with quaking hearts. But it was distant, low growling thunder, and after a little it died away. The girls, under their wool coverings, were warm and comfortable, and their laughter and chatter ceased as they dropped off to sleep.

It seemed as if the storm spirits had maliciously waited that their onset might be the more effective, for when all was quiet, and everybody in camp asleep, the muttering of the thunder grew louder, lightning began to zigzag across the black cloud masses, and the whistling of the wind deepened to a steady ominous growl. Tent ropes creaked under the strain of the heavy blasts; trees writhed and twisted, and the rain came in gusts, swift, spiteful, and icy cold. In the dining-room Mrs. Royall awoke from a light doze and piled fresh logs on the fire. Anne and Laura, whom she had kept with her in case their help might be needed, peered anxiously out of the windows.

"Can't see a thing but black night except when the flashes come," Anne said, "but this uproar is bound to awaken the girls."

"And some of them are sure to be frightened," added Mrs. Royall.

"It is enough to frighten them--all this tumult," Laura said. "I wish we could get them all in here."

"I'd have kept them all here and made a big field bed on the floor if I had thought we were going to have such a storm as this," Mrs. Royall said

anxiously. "If it doesn't lessen soon, I shall take a lantern and go the round of the tents to see if all is right."

As she spoke there came a loud rattling peal of thunder, followed immediately by a blinding flash of lightning that zigzagged across the sky, making the dense darkness yet blacker by contrast.

It was then that Mary Hastings, sitting up in bed, caught a glimpse, in the glare of the lightning, of Annie Pearson's white terrified face in the next cot.

"O Mary, I'm sc--scared to d--death!" Annie whimpered, her teeth chattering with cold and terror.

"We are all right if only our tent doesn't blow over," returned Mary, and her steady voice quieted Annie for the moment. "If it does, we must make a dive for the dining-room. Got your raincoats and rubbers handy, girls?"

"I'm putting mine on," Olga's voice was as cool and undisturbed as Mary's. She turned towards the next cot and added, "Elizabeth, you've no raincoat. Wrap yourself in your rubber blanket if the tent goes."

"Ye--es," returned Elizabeth, with a little frightened gasp.

Under the bedclothes Annie Pearson was sobbing and moaning, "O, I wish I was home! I wish I was home!"

Mary Hastings spoke sternly. "Annie Pearson, if you don't stop that whimpering I'll shake you!"

Annie subsided into sniffling silence. Outside there was a lull, and after a moment, Mary added hopefully, "There, I guess the worst is over, and we're all right."

While the words were yet on her lips, the storm leaped up like a giant refreshed. Rain came down in a deluge, beating through tent-canvas and spraying, with fine mist, the faces of the girls. Another vivid glare of

lightning was followed by a long, loud rattling peal ending in a terrific crash that seemed fairly to rend the heavens, while the wind shook the tents as if giant hands were trying to wrest them from their fastenings. Then from all over the camp arose frightened shrieks and wails and cries, but Annie Pearson now was too terrified to utter a word. The next moment there was a loud, ripping tearing sound, and as fresh cries broke out, Mrs. Royall's voice, clear and steady, rose above the tumult.

"Be quiet, girls," she called. "One tent has gone over, but nobody's hurt. Mary Hastings, slip on your coat and rubbers, and come and help us--quick!"

"I'm coming," called Mary instantly, and directly she was out in the storm. Where the next tent had been, nothing but the wooden flooring, the iron cots, and four wooden boxes remained, and over these the rain was pouring in heavy, blinding sheets. Mrs. Royall, as wet as if she had just come out of the bay, was holding up a lantern, by the light of which Mary caught a fleeting glimpse of four figures in dripping raincoats scudding towards the dining-room, while two others followed them with arms full of wet bedding.

Mrs. Royall told Mary to gather up the bedding from a third cot and carry that to the dining-room, "And you take the rest of it," she added to another girl, who had followed Mary. "And stay in the dining-room--both of you. Don't come out again. Miss Anne will tell you what to do there."

She held the lantern high until the girls reached the dining-room, then she hurried to another tent, from which came a hubbub of frightened cries. Pushing aside the canvas curtain she stepped inside the tent, and holding up her lantern, looked about her. The cries and excited exclamations ceased at the sight of her, though one girl could not control her nervous sobbing.

"What is the matter here? Your tent hasn't blown over. What are you crying about, Rose?" Mrs. Royall demanded.

Rose Anderson, an excitable little creature of fifteen, lifted a face white as chalk. "O," she sobbed, "something came in--right up on my bed. It was big and--and furry--and *wet*! O Mrs. Royall, I never was so scared in my life!" She ended with a burst of hysterical sobbing.

Mrs. Royall cast a swift searching glance around the tent, then--wet and cold and worried as she was, her face crinkled into sudden laughter.

"Look, Rose--over there on that box. That must be the wet, furry *big* intruder that scared you so!"

Four pairs of round frightened eyes followed her pointing finger; and on the box they saw a half-grown rabbit, with eyes bulging like marbles as the little creature crouched there in deadly terror. One glance, and three of the girls broke into shrieks of nervous laughter in which, after a moment, Rose joined. And having begun to laugh the girls kept on, until those in the other tents began to wonder if somebody had gone crazy. Mrs. Royall finally had to speak sternly to put an end to the hysterical chorus.

"There, there, girls, that will do--now be quiet! Listen, the thunder is fainter now, and the lightning less sharp. I think the wind is going down too. Are any of you wet?"

"Only--only Rose, where the *big* furry thing----" began one, and at that a fresh peal of laughter rang out. But Mrs. Royall's grave face silenced it quickly.

"Listen, girls," she repeated, "you are keeping me here when I am needed to look after others. I cannot go until you are quiet. I'll take this half-drowned rabbit"--she reached over and picked up the trembling little

creature--"with me; and now I think you can go to sleep. I am sure the worst of the storm is over."

"We will be quiet, Mrs. Royall," Edith Rue promised, her lips twitching again as she looked at the shivering rabbit.

"And I hope now *you* can get some rest," another added, and then Mrs. Royall dropped the curtain and went out again into the rain, which was still falling heavily. All the other tents had withstood the gale, and when Mrs. Royall had looked into each one, answered the eager questions of the girls, and assured them that no one was hurt and the worst of the storm was over, she hurried back to the dining-room. There she found that Anne and Laura had warmed and dried the girls, who had been turned out of their tent, given them hot milk, and made up dry beds for them on the floor.

"They are warm as toast," Anne assured her.

"And now you and I will get back to bed, Elizabeth," Mary Hastings said, again slipping on her raincoat, while Laura quietly threw her own over the other girl's shoulders.

"Wait a minute," Mrs. Royall ordered, and brought them two sandbags hot from the kitchen oven. "You must not go to sleep with cold feet. And thank you both for your help," she added. "I'll hold the lantern here at the door so you can see your way." But Laura quietly took the lantern from her, and held it till Mary called, "All right!"

"Is that you, Mary?" Olga's quiet voice questioned, as the girls entered the tent.

"Yes--Elizabeth and I. The excitement is all over and the storm will be soon. Let's all get to sleep as fast as we can."

"Elizabeth!" Olga repeated to herself. She had not known that Elizabeth had left her cot. "Why did you go?" she asked in a low tone, as Elizabeth crept under the blankets.

"Why--to help," the Poor Thing answered, squeezing the hand that touched hers in the darkness.

The storm surely was lessening now. The lightning came at longer intervals and the thunder lagged farther and farther behind it. The rain still fell, but not so heavily, and the roar of the wind had died down to a sullen growl. In ten minutes the other three girls were sound asleep, but Olga lay long awake, her eyes searching the darkness, as her thoughts searched her own soul, finding there some things that greatly astonished her.

VI

A WATER CURE

There were some pale cheeks and heavy eyes the next morning, but no one had taken cold from the exposure of the night, and most of the girls were as fresh and full of life as ever. The camp, however, was strewn with leaves and broken branches, and one tree was uprooted. Mrs. Royall's face was grave as she thought of what might have been, had that tree fallen across any of the tents. It was a heavy responsibility that she carried with these forty girls under her charge, and never had she felt it more deeply than now.

The baby bunny was evidently somebody's stray pet, for it submitted to handling as if used to it, showed no desire to get away, and contentedly nibbled the lettuce leaves and carrots which the girls begged of Katie.

"He fairly *purrs* when I scratch his head," Louise Johnson declared gaily. "Girls, we must keep him for the camp mascot."

"Looks as if we should have to keep him unless a claimant appears," Mary Hastings said. "I've almost stepped on him twice already. I don't believe we could drive him away with a club."

"Nobody wants to drive him away," retorted Louise, lifting him by his long ears, "unless maybe Rose," she added, with a teasing glance over her shoulder. "You know Rose doesn't care for *big* furry things."

"Well, I guess," protested Rose, "if he had flopped into your face all dripping wet, in the dark, as he did into mine last night, you wouldn't have stopped to measure him before you yelled, any more than I did. He *felt* as big as--a wildcat, so there!" and Rose turned away with flushed cheeks, followed by shouts of teasing laughter.

"It's--too bad. I'd have been scared too," said a low voice, and Rose, turning, stared in amazement at the Poor Thing--the *Poor Thing*--for almost the first time since she came to camp, volunteering a remark.

"Why--why, you Po--*Elizabeth*!" Rose stammered, and then suddenly she slipped her arm around Elizabeth's waist and drew her off to the hammock behind the pines. "Come," she said, "I want to tell you about it. The girls are all laughing at me--especially Louise Johnson--but it wasn't any laughing matter to me last night. I was scared stiff--truly I was!" She poured the story of her experiences into the other girl's ears. The fact that Elizabeth said nothing made no difference to Rose. She felt the silent sympathy and was comforted. When she had talked herself out, Elizabeth slipped away and sought Olga, but Olga was nowhere to be found--not in the camp nor on the beach, but one of the boats was missing, and at last a girl told Elizabeth that she had seen Olga go off alone in it. That meant an age of anxious watching and waiting for the Poor Thing. She never could get over her horror of the treacherous blue water. To her it was a great restless monster forever reaching out after some living thing to clutch and drag down into its cruel bosom. It was agony to her to see Olga swim and dive; hardly less agony to see her go off in a boat or canoe. Always Elizabeth was sure that *this* time she would not come back.

[Illustration: We pull long, we pull strong, A dip now--a foaming prow
We pull keen and true; Through waters so blue We sing to the king of the
great black rocks Through waters we glide like a long-tailed fox]

She had put on her bathing suit, for Olga still made her wade every morning, and she wandered forlornly along the beach, and finally ventured a little way into the water. It was horrible to do even that alone, but she had promised, and she must do it even if Olga was not there to know. A troop of girls in bathing suits came racing down to the beach, Anne and Laura following them.

"What--who is that standing out in the water all alone?" demanded Anne Wentworth, who was a little near-sighted.

Annie Pearson broke into a peal of laughter. "It's that Poor Thing," she cried. "Did you ever see such a forlorn figure!"

"Looks like a sick penguin," laughed Louise Johnson.

"Why in the world is she standing there all alone?" cried Laura, and hurried on ahead, calling, "Elizabeth--Elizabeth, come here. I want you."

Elizabeth, standing in water up to her ankles, hesitated for a moment, swept the wide stretch of blue with a wistful searching glance, and then obeyed the summons.

"Why were you standing there, dear?" Laura questioned gently, leading her away from the laughing curious girls.

Elizabeth lifted earnest eyes to the kind face bending towards her.

"I promised Olga I'd wade every day--so I had to." Then she broke out, "O Miss Laura, do you think she'll come back? She went all alone, and she isn't anywhere in sight."

Laura drew the shivering little figure close to her side. "Why, of course she'll come back, Elizabeth. Why shouldn't she? She's been out so scores of times, just as I have. What makes you worry so, child?"

Elizabeth drew a long shuddering breath. "I can't help it," she sighed.

"The water always makes me *so* afraid, Miss Laura!"

She lifted such a white miserable face that Laura saw it was really true--she was in the grip of a deadly terror. She drew the trembling girl down beside her on the warm sand. "Let's sit here a little while," she said, and for a few minutes they sat in silence, while further up the beach girls were wading and swimming and splashing each other, their shouts of laughter making a merry din. Some were diving from the pier, and one

stood on a high springboard. Suddenly this one flung out her arms and sprang off, her slim body seeming to float between sky and water, as she swept downward in a graceful curving line.

Laura caught her breath nervously as her eyes followed the slender figure that looked so very small outstretched between sky and water, and Elizabeth covered her eyes with a little moan.

"O, I wish she wouldn't do that--I do wish she wouldn't!" she said under her breath.

Laura spoke cheerfully. "She is all right. See, Elizabeth, how fast she is swimming now."

But Elizabeth shook her head and would not look. Laura put her arm across the narrow shrinking shoulders and after a moment spoke again, slowly. "Elizabeth, you love Olga, don't you?"

Elizabeth looked up quickly. She did not answer--or need to.

"Yes, I know you do," Laura went on, answering the look. "But do you love her enough to do something very hard--for her?"

"Yes, Miss Laura. Tell me what. She won't ever let me do anything for her."

"It will be very, very hard for you," Laura warned her.

The girl looked at her silently, and waited.

"Elizabeth, I don't think you could do anything else that would please her so much as to conquer your fear of the water *for her sake*. Can you do such a hard thing as that--for Olga?"

A look of positive agony swept over Elizabeth's face. "Anything but just that," she moaned. "O Miss Laura, you don't know--you *can't* know how I hate it--that deep black water!"

"But can't you--even for Olga?" Laura questioned very gently.

Elizabeth shook her head and two big tears rolled down her cheeks. "I would if I could. I'd do anything, anything else for her; but that--I *can't*!" she moaned.

Laura put her hand under the trembling chin, and lifting the girl's face looked deep into the blue eyes swimming with tears.

"Elizabeth," she said slowly, a world of love and sympathy in her voice, "Elizabeth, you *can*!"

In that long deep look the dread and horror and misery died slowly out of Elizabeth's eyes, and a faint incredulous hope began to grow in them. It was as if she literally drew courage and determination from the eyes looking into hers, and who can tell what subtle spirit message really passed from the strong soul into the weaker one?

"I never, never could," Elizabeth faltered; but Laura caught the note of wavering hope in the low-spoken words.

"Elizabeth, you can. I *know* you can," she repeated.

"How?" questioned Elizabeth, and Laura smiled and drew her closer.

"You are afraid of the water," she said, "and your fear is like a cord that binds your will just as your arms might be bound to your sides with a scarf. But you can break the cord, and when you do, you will not be afraid of the water any more. Myra Karr was afraid just as you are--afraid of almost everything, but one wonderful day she conquered her fear. Ask her and she will tell you about it, and how much happier she has been ever since, as you will be when you have broken your cords. And just think how it will please Olga!"

There was a little silence; then suddenly Elizabeth leaned forward, eagerly pointing off over the water. "Is it--is she coming?" she whispered.

"Yes, she is coming. Now just think how you have suffered worrying over her this morning, and all for nothing."

Elizabeth drew a long happy breath. "I don't care now she's coming," she said, and it was as if she sang the words.

Laura went on, "Have you noticed, Elizabeth, how different Olga is from the other girls? She never laughs and frolics. She never really enjoys any of the games. She cares for nothing but work. She hasn't a single friend in the camp--she won't have one. I don't think she is happy, do you?"

Elizabeth considered that in silence. She had known these things, but she had never thought of them before.

"It's so," she admitted finally, her eyes on the approaching boat.

"Elizabeth, I think you are the only one who can really help Olga."

"I?" Elizabeth lifted wondering eyes. Then she added hastily, "You mean--going in the water?" She shuddered at the thought.

"Yes, dear, if you will let Olga help you to get rid of your fear of the water, it will mean more to her even than to you. Olga needs you, child, more than you need her, for you have many friends now in the camp, and she has only you."

"I like her the best of all," Elizabeth declared loyally.

"Yes, but you must prove it to her before you can really help her," Laura replied. "See, she is almost in now, and I won't keep you any longer."

Olga secured her boat to a ring and ran lightly up the steps. In a few minutes she came back in her bathing suit. As she ran down the beach,

she swept a swift searching glance over the few girls sitting or lying on the sand; then her eyes rested on a little shrinking figure standing like a small blue post, knee deep in the water. It was Elizabeth, her cheeks colourless, her eyes fixed beseechingly, imploringly, on Olga's face. In a flash Olga was beside her, crying out sharply,

"What made you come in alone?"

"I p-promised you----" Elizabeth replied, her teeth chattering.

"Well, you've done it," said Olga. "Cut out now and get dressed."

But Elizabeth stood still and shook her head. "No," though her lips trembled, her voice was determined, "no, Olga, I'm going up to my--my neck to-day," and she held out her hands.

"You are not--you're coming out!" Olga declared. "You're in a blue funk this minute."

"I--know it," gasped Elizabeth, "but I'm going in--*alone*--if you won't go with me. Quick, Olga, quick!" she implored.

Some instinct stilled the remonstrance on Olga's lips. She grasped Elizabeth by her shoulders and walking backward herself, drew the other girl steadily on until the water rose to her neck. Elizabeth gasped, and deadly fear looked out of her straining eyes, but she made no sound. The next instant Olga had turned and was pulling her swiftly back to the beach.

"There! You see it didn't hurt you," she said brusquely, but never before had she looked at Elizabeth as she looked at her then. "Now run to the bathhouse and rub yourself hard before you dress," she ordered.

But Elizabeth had turned again towards the water, and Olga followed, amazed and protesting.

"Go back," cried Elizabeth over her shoulder, "go back. I'm going in alone this time."

And alone she went until once more the water surged and rippled about her neck. Only an instant--then she swayed and her eyes closed; but before she could lose her footing Olga's hands were on her shoulders and pushing her swiftly back to the beach. This time, however, she did not stop there, but swept the small figure over to the bathhouse. There she gave Elizabeth a brisk rubdown that set the blood dancing in her veins.

"Now get into your clothes in a hurry!" she commanded.

"I'm--n-not c-cold, Olga," Elizabeth protested with a pallid smile, "truly I'm not. I'm just n-nervous, I guess."

"You're just a *brick*, Elizabeth Page!" cried Olga, and she slammed the door and vanished, leaving Elizabeth glowing with delight.

Each day after that Elizabeth insisted on venturing a little more. Olga could guess what it cost her--her blue lips and the terror in her eyes told that--but day after day she fought her battle over and would not be worsted. She learned to float, to tread water, and then, very, very slowly, she learned to swim a little. Laura, looking on, rejoiced over both the girls. Everybody was interested in this marvellous achievement of the Poor Thing--they spoke of her less often by that name now--but only Laura realised how much it meant to Olga too. The day that Elizabeth succeeded in swimming a few yards, Olga for the first time took her out on the water at sunset; she had never been willing to go before. Even now she stepped into the boat shrinkingly, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, but when she was seated, and the boat floating gently on the rose-tinted water, the tense lines faded slowly from her face, and at last she even smiled a little.

"Well," said Olga, "are you still scared?"

"A little--but not much. If I wasn't any afraid it would be lovely--like rocking in a big, big beautiful cradle," she ended dreamily.

A swift glance assured Olga that they had drifted away from the other boats--there was no one within hearing. She leaned forward and looked straight into the eyes of the other girl. "Now I want to know what made you get over your fear of the water," she said.

"Maybe I've not got over it--quite," Elizabeth parried.

"What made you? Tell me!" Olga's tone was peremptory.

"You," said Elizabeth.

"I? But I didn't--I couldn't. I'd done my best, but I couldn't drag you into water above your knees--you know I couldn't. Somebody else did it," Olga declared, a spark flickering in her eyes.

"Miss Laura talked to me that day you were off so long in the boat," Elizabeth admitted. "She told me I could get over being afraid. I didn't think I *could* before--truly, Olga. I honestly thought I'd die if ever the water came up to my neck. I don't know how she did it--Miss Laura--but she made me see that I could get over being so awfully afraid--and I did."

"You said *I* did it," there was reproach as well as jealousy now in Olga's voice, "and it was Miss Laura."

"O no, it was you really," Elizabeth cried hastily, "because I did it for you. I never could have--never in this world!--only Miss Laura said it would please you. I did it for you, Olga."

"Hm," was Olga's only response, but now there was in her eyes something that the Poor Thing had never seen there before--a warm human friendliness that made Elizabeth radiantly happy.

"There comes the war canoe," Olga cried a moment later.

"How fast it comes--and how pretty the singing sounds!" Elizabeth returned.

They watched the big canoe as it flashed by, the many paddles rising and falling as one, while a dozen young voices sang gaily,

"We pull long, we pull strong, We pull keen and true. We sing to the king of the great black rocks, Through waters we glide like a long-tailed fox."

"Next year," said Olga, "I'm going to teach you to paddle, Elizabeth."

VII

HONOURS WON

The camp was to break up in a few days, and the Guardians had planned to make the last Council Fire as picturesque and effective as possible--something for the girls to hold as a beautiful memory through the months to come. It fell on a lovely evening, a cool breeze blowing from the water, and a young moon adding a golden gleam to the silvery shining of the stars. Most of the girls had finished their ceremonial dresses and all were to be worn to-night.

"I'm ridiculously excited, Anne," Laura said, as she looked down at her woods-brown robe with its fringes and embroideries. "I don't feel a bit as if I were prosaic Laura Haven. I'm really one of the nut-brown Indian maids that roamed these woods in ages past."

"If any of those nut-brown maids were as pretty as you are to-night, they must have had all the braves at their feet," returned Anne, with an admiring glance at her friend. "What splendid thick braids you have, Laura!"

"I'm acquainted with the braids," Laura answered, flinging them carelessly over her shoulders, "but this beautiful bead headband I've never worn before. Is it on right?"

"All right," Anne replied. "The Busy Corner girls will be proud of their Guardian to-night."

Laura scarcely heard, her thoughts were so full of her girls--the girls she had already learned to love. She turned eagerly as the bugle notes of the Council call rang out in silvery sweetness. "O, come. Don't let them start without us," she urged.

"No danger--they will want their Guardians to lead the procession."

In a moment Mrs. Royall appeared, and quickly the girls fell into line behind her. First, the four Guardians; then two Torch Bearers, each holding aloft in her right hand a lighted lantern. Flaming torches would have been more picturesque, but also more dangerous in the woods, and all risk of fire must be avoided. After the Torch Bearers came the Fire Makers, and last of all the Wood Gatherers, with Katie the cook wearing a gorgeous robe that some of the girls had embroidered for her. Katie's unfailing good nature had made her a general favourite in camp.

As the procession wound through the irregular woods-path Laura gave a little cry of delight.

"O, do look back, Anne--it is so pretty," she said. "If it wasn't that I want to be a part of it, I'd run ahead so I could see it all better."

Mrs. Royall began to sing and the girls instantly caught up the strain, and in and out among the trees the procession wound to the music of the young voices, the lanterns throwing flashes of light on either side, while the shadows seemed to slip out of the woods and follow "like a procession of black-robed nuns," Laura said to herself.

The Council chamber was a high open space, surrounded on every side but one by tall pines. The open side faced the bay, and across the water glimmered a tiny golden pathway from the moon in the western sky, where a golden glow from the sunset yet lingered.

The girls formed the semicircle, with the Guardians in the open space. Wood had been gathered earlier in the day, and now the Wood Gatherers, each taking a stick, laid it where the fire was to be. As the last stick was brought, the Fire Makers moved forward and swiftly and skilfully set the wood ready for lighting. On this occasion, to save time, the rubbing sticks were dispensed with, and Mrs. Royall signed to Laura to light the fire with a match.

The usual order of exercises followed, the songs and chants echoing with a solemn sweetness among the tall pines in whose tops the night wind played a soft accompaniment.

To-night the interest of the girls centred in the awarding of honours. All of the Busy Corner girls had won more or less, and as Laura read each name and announced the honours, the girl came forward and received her beads from the Chief Guardian. Mrs. Royall had a smile and a pleasant word for each one; but when Myra Karr stood before her, she laid her hand very kindly on the girl's shoulder and turned to the listening circle.

"Camp Fire Girls," she said, "here is one who is to receive special honour at our hands to-night, for she has won a great victory. You all know how fearful and timid she was, for you yourselves called her--Bunny. Now she has fought and conquered her great dragon--Fear--and you have dropped that name, and she must never again be called by it."

[Illustration: "Wood had been gathered earlier in the day"]

With a pencil, on a bit of birch bark, she wrote the name and dropped the bark into the heart of the glowing fire. "It is gone forever," she said, her hand again on Myra's shoulder. "Now what shall be the new Camp Fire name of our comrade?"

Several names were suggested, and finally Watewin, the Indian word for one who conquers, was chosen. Myra stood with radiant eyes looking about the circle until Mrs. Royall said, "Myra, we give you to-night your new name. You are Watewin, for you have conquered fear," and the girl walked back to her place, joy shining in her eyes.

Then Mrs. Royall spoke again, her glance sweeping the circle of intent faces. "There is another who has conquered the dragon--Fear--and who deserves high honour--Elizabeth Page."

Elizabeth, absorbed in watching Myra's radiant face, had absolutely forgotten herself, and did not even notice when her own name was spoken. Olga had to tell her and give her a little push forward before she realised that Mrs. Royall was waiting for her. For a second she drew back; then, catching her breath, she went gravely forward. The voice and eyes of the Chief Guardian were very tender as she looked down into the shy blue eyes lifted to hers.

"You too, Elizabeth," she said, "have fought and conquered, not once, but many times, and to you also we give to-night a new name." She did not repeat the old one, but writing it on a bit of bark as she had written Myra's, she told the girl to drop it into the fire. Elizabeth obeyed--she had never known what the girls had christened her and now she did not care. Breathlessly she listened as Mrs. Royall went on, "Camp Fire Girls, what shall be her new name?"

It was Laura who answered after a little silence, "Adawana, the brave and faithful."

"Adawana, the brave and faithful," Mrs. Royall repeated. "Is that right? Is it the right name for Elizabeth, Camp Fire Girls?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" came the response from two score eager voices.

"You are Adawana, the brave and faithful," said Mrs. Royall, looking down again into the blue eyes, full now of wonder and shy joy.

"Now listen to the honours that Adawana has won."

As Laura read the long list a murmur of surprise ran round the circle. The girls had known that Elizabeth would have some honours, for they all knew how Olga had compelled her to do things, but no one had imagined that there would be anything like this long list--least of all had Elizabeth herself imagined it. Perplexity and dismay were in her eyes as she listened, and as Laura finished the reading, Elizabeth whispered quickly,

"O Miss Laura, there's some mistake. I couldn't have all those--not half so many!"

"It's all right, dear," Laura assured her, and in a louder tone she added, "There is no mistake. The record has been carefully kept and verified; but you see Elizabeth was not working for honours, and had no idea how many she had won."

Elizabeth looked fairly dazed as Mrs. Royall threw over her head the necklace with its red and blue and orange beads. Turning, she hurried back to her place next Olga.

"It was all you--you did it. You ought to have the honours instead of me," she whispered, half crying.

"It's all right. Don't be a *baby*!" Olga flung at her savagely, to forestall the tears.

Then somebody nudged her and whispered, "Olga Priest, don't you hear Mrs. Royall calling you?"

Wondering, Olga obeyed the summons. She had reported no honours won, and had no idea why she was called. Laura, standing beside Mrs. Royall, smiled happily at the girl as she stopped, and stood, her dark brows drawn together in a frown of perplexity.

"Olga," Mrs. Royall said, "it has been a great joy to us to bestow upon Adawana the symbols which represent the honours she has won. We are sure that she will wear them worthily, and that her life will be better and happier because of that for which they stand. We recognise the fact, however, that but for you she could not have won these honours. You have worked harder than she has to secure them for her; therefore to you belongs the greater honour----"

"No! *No!*" cried Olga under her breath, but with a smile Mrs. Royall went on, "We know that to you the symbols of honours won--beads and

ornaments--have little value--but we have for you something that we hope you will value because we all have a share in it, every one in the camp; and we ask you to wear this because you have shown us what one Camp Fire Girl can do for another. The work is all Elizabeth's. The rest of us only gave the beads, and your Guardian taught Elizabeth how to use them."

She held out a headband, beautiful in design and colouring. Olga stared at it, at first too utterly amazed for any words. Finally she stammered, "Why, I--I--didn't know--Elizabeth----" and then to her own utter consternation came a rush of tears. *Tears!* And she had lived dry-eyed through four years of lonely misery. Choked, blinded, and unable to speak even a word of thanks, she took the headband and turned hastily away, and as she went the watching circle chanted very low,

"Wohelo means love. Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten--that self is forgotten."

With shining eyes--yet half afraid--Elizabeth waited as Olga came back to her. She knew Olga's scorn for honours and ornaments. Would she be scornful now--or would she be glad? Elizabeth felt that she never, never could endure it if Olga were scornful or angry now--if this, her great secret, her long, hard labour of love--should be only a great disappointment after all.

But it was not. She knew that it was not as soon as Olga was near enough to see the look in her eyes. She knew then that it was all right; and the poor little hungry heart of her sang for joy when Olga placed the band over her forehead and bent her proud head for Elizabeth to fasten it in place. Elizabeth did it with fingers trembling with happy excitement. The coldness that had so often chilled her was all gone now from the dark eyes. Olga understood. Elizabeth had no more voice than a duckling, but she felt just then as if she could sing like a song sparrow from sheer

happiness. It was such a wonderful thing to be happy! Elizabeth had never before known the joy of it.

But Mrs. Royall was speaking again. "Wohelo means work and health and love," she said, "you all know that--the three best things in all this beautiful world. Which of the three is best of all?"

Softly Anne Wentworth sang,

"Wohelo means love,"

and instantly the girls took up the refrain,

"Wohelo means love, Wohelo means love. Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten. Wohelo means love."

Laura's eyes, watching the young, earnest faces, filled with quick tears as the refrain was repeated softly and lingeringly, again and yet again. Mrs. Royall stood motionless until the last low note died into silence. Then she went on:

"Work is splendid for mind and body. Some of you have worked for honours and that is well. Some have worked for the love of the work--that is better. Some have worked--or fought--for conquest over weakness, and that is better yet. But two of our number have worked and conquered, not for honour, not for love of labour, not even for self-conquest--but for unselfish love of another. That is the highest form of service, dear Camp Fire Girls--the service that is done in forgetfulness of self. That is the thought I leave with you to-night."

She stepped back, and instantly each girl placed her right hand over her heart and all together repeated slowly,

"This Law of the Fire I will strive to follow
With all the strength And
endurance of my body, The power of my will, The keenness of my mind,
The warmth of my heart, And the sincerity of my spirit."

The fire had died down to glowing coals. At a sign from the Chief Guardian two of the Fire Makers extinguished the embers, pouring water over them till not a spark remained. The lanterns were relighted, the procession formed again, and the girls marched back, singing as they went.

"O dear, I can't bear to think that we shall not have another Council Fire like this for months--even if we come here next summer," Mary Hastings said when they were back in camp.

"And wasn't this the very dearest one!" cried Bessie Carroll. "With Myra's honours and Elizabeth's, and Olga's headband--*wasn't* she surprised, though!"

"First time I ever saw Olga Priest dumfounded," laughed Louise. "But, say, girls--that Poor Thing is a duck after all--she is really."

Bessie's plump hand covered Louise's lips. "Hush, hush!" she cried in a tone of real distress, for she loved Elizabeth. "That name is burnt up."

"So it is--beg everybody's pardon," yawned Louise. "But Elizabeth couldn't hear way over there with Olga and Miss Laura. I say, girls," she added with her usual giggle, "I feel as if I'd been wound up to concert pitch and I've got to let down somehow. Get out your fiddle, Rose, and play us a jig. I've got to get some of this seriousness out of my system before I go to bed."

Rose ran for her violin, and two minutes later the girls were dancing gaily in the moonlight.

"I wish they hadn't," Laura whispered to Anne. "I wanted to keep the impression of that lovely soft chanting for the last."

"You can't do it--not with Louise Johnson around," returned Anne. "But never mind, Laura, they won't forget this meeting, even if they do have to

'react' a bit. I'm sure that even Louise will keep the memory of this last Council tucked away in some corner of her harum-scarum mind."

VIII

ELIZABETH AT HOME

In a tiny hall bedroom in one of the small brick houses that cover many blocks in certain sections of Washington, Elizabeth Page was standing a week later, trying to screw up her courage to a deed of daring; and because it was for herself it seemed almost impossible for her to do it. With her white face, her anxious eyes, and trembling hands, she seemed again the Poor Thing who had shrunk from every one those first days at the camp--every one but Olga.

Three times Elizabeth started to go downstairs and three times her courage failed and she drew back. So long as she waited there was a chance--a very faint one, but still a chance--that the thing she so desired might come true. But the minutes were slipping away, and finally, setting her lips desperately, she fairly ran down the stairs.

Her stepmother glanced up with a frown as the girl stood before her.

"Well, what now?" she demanded, in the sharp, fretful tone of one whose nerves are all a-jangle.

"I've done everything--all the supper work, and fixed everything in the kitchen ready for morning," Elizabeth said, her words tumbling over each other in her excitement, "and O, please may I go this evening--to Miss Laura's? It's the Camp Fire meeting, and one of the girls is going to stop here for me, and--and O, I'll do *anything* if only I may go!"

The frown on the woman's face deepened as Elizabeth stumbled on, and her answer was swift and sharp.

"You are not going one step out of this house to-night--you can make up your mind to that--not one step. I knew when I let you go off to that camp that it would be just this way. Girls like you are never satisfied. You want

the earth. Here you've had a month--a whole month--off in the country while I stood in that hot kitchen and did your work for you, and now you are teasing to go stringing off again. You are *not going*."

"But," pleaded Elizabeth desperately, "I've worked so hard to-day--every minute since five o'clock--and I washed and ironed Sadie's white dress before supper. If there was any work I had to do it would be different. And--and even servant girls have an afternoon and evening off every week, and I never do. And I'm only asking now to go out one evening in a month--just *one*!"

"There it is again!" Mrs. Page flung out. "Not this one evening, but an evening every month; and if I agreed to that, next thing you'd be wanting to go every week. I tell you--*no*. Now let that end it."

The tears welled up in Elizabeth's eyes as she turned slowly away; and the sight of those tears awakened a tumult in another quarter.

Four-year-old Molly had been rocking her Teddy Bear to sleep when Elizabeth came downstairs, and had listened, wide-eyed and wondering, to all that passed. But tears in Elizabeth's eyes were too much. The Teddy Bear tumbled unheeded to the floor as Molly rushed across to Elizabeth and, clinging to her skirts, turned a small flushed face to her mother.

"Naughty, naughty mamma--make 'Lizbet' *ky*!" she cried out, stamping her small foot angrily. "Molly love 'Lizbet' *hard*!"

Elizabeth caught up the child and turned to go, but a sharp command stopped her. "Put that child down. I won't have you setting her against her own mother!"

Elizabeth unclasped the little clinging arms and put the child down, but Molly still clutched her dress, sobbing now and hiding her face from her mother. The tinkle of the doorbell cut the tense silence that followed Mrs. Page's last command. Sadie, an older girl, ran to open it, flashing a triumphant glance at Elizabeth as she passed her.

As Sadie flung open the door, Elizabeth saw Olga on the step, and Olga's quick eyes took in the scene--the frowning woman, Elizabeth's wet eyes and drooping mouth, and little Molly clinging to her skirts as she looked over her shoulder to see who had come. Sadie stared pertly at Olga and waited for her to speak.

"I've come for Elizabeth. I'm Olga----"

"Elizabeth can't go. Mother won't let her," interrupted Sadie with ill-concealed satisfaction in her narrow eyes.

Elizabeth started towards the door. "O Olga, please tell Miss Laura----" she was beginning when Sadie unceremoniously slammed the door and marched back with a victorious air to her mother's side.

Olga was left staring at the outside of the door, and if a look could have demolished it and annihilated Miss Sadie, both these things might have happened then and there. But the door stood firm, and there was no reason to think that anything untoward had happened to Sadie; so after a moment Olga turned, flew down the steps, and hurrying over to the car-line, hailed the first car that appeared. Fifteen minutes later she was ringing the bell at the door of Judge Haven's big stone house on Wyoming Avenue. The servants in that house never turned away any girl asking for Miss Laura, so this one was promptly shown into the library. Laura rose to meet her with a cordial greeting, but Olga neither heard nor heeded.

"She can't come. Elizabeth can't come!" she cried out. "They wouldn't even let me speak to her, though she was right there in the hall--nor let her give me a message for you. Her sister slammed the door in my face. Miss Laura, I'd like to *kill* that girl and her mother!"

"Hush, hush, my dear!" Laura said gently. "Sit down and tell me quietly just what happened."

Olga flung herself into a chair and told her story, but she could not tell it quietly. She told it with eyes flashing under frowning brows and her words were full of bitterness.

"Elizabeth's just a slave to them--worse than a servant!" she stormed. "She never goes anywhere--*never*! They wouldn't have let her go to the camp if she hadn't been sick and the doctor said she'd die if she didn't have a rest and change, and so Miss Grandis got her off. O Miss Laura, can't you do something about it? Elizabeth *wanted* so to come--she was crying. I know how she was counting on it before we left the camp."

Laura shook her head sorrowfully. "I don't know what I can do. You see she is not yet of age, and her father has a right--a legal right, I mean--to keep her at home."

"But it isn't her father, it's that woman--his wife," Olga declared. "She won't even let Elizabeth call her mother--not that I should think she'd want to--but when I asked Elizabeth why she called her Mrs. Page she said her stepmother told her when she first came there that she didn't want a great girl that didn't belong to her calling her mother."

"Elizabeth is seventeen?" Laura questioned.

Olga nodded. "She won't be eighteen till next April. *I* wouldn't stay there till I was eighteen. I'd clear out. She could earn her own living and not work half as hard somewhere else, and go out when she liked, too." She was silent for a moment, then half aloud she added, "I'll find a way to fix that woman yet!"

"Olga," Laura looked straight into the sombre angry eyes, "you must not interfere in this matter. Two wrongs will never make a right. If there is anything that can be done for Elizabeth, be sure that I will do it. And if not--it is only seven months to April."

"Seven months!" echoed Olga passionately. "Miss Laura, how would you live through seven months without ever getting out *anywhere*?"

Laura shook her head. "We will hope that Elizabeth will not have to do that," she said gently. "But I hear some of the girls. Come."

In the wide hall were half a dozen girls who had just arrived, and Laura led the way to a large room on the third floor. At the door of this room, the girls broke into cries and exclamations of pleasure.

"It's like a bit of the camp," Mary Hastings cried, and Rose Anderson exclaimed,

"It's just the sweetest room I ever saw!" and she sniffed delightedly the spicy fragrance of the pines and balsam firs that stood in great green tubs about the walls. On the floor was a grass rug of green and wood-colour, and against the walls stood several long low settees of brown rattan, backs and seats cushioned in cretonne of soft greens and cream-colour, and a few chairs of like pattern were scattered about. Curtains of cream-coloured cheesecloth, with a stencilled design of pine cones in shaded browns, draped the windows, and in the wide fireplace a fire was laid ready for lighting. The low mantelpiece above it held only three brass candlesticks with bayberry candles, and above it, beautifully lettered in sepia, were the words,

"Whoso shall stand by this hearthstone, Flame-fanned, Shall never, never stand alone: Whose house is dark and bare and cold, Whose house is cold, This is his own."

And below this

"Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten."

Bessie Carroll drew a long breath as she looked about, and said earnestly, "Miss Laura, I never, never saw any place so dear! I didn't think there could be such a pretty room."

Laura bent and kissed the earnest little face. "I am glad you like it so much, dear," she said. "I like it too. You remember the very first words of our Camp Fire law--'Seek beauty'? I thought of that when I was furnishing this. It is our Camp Fire room, girls, and I hope we shall have many happy times together here."

"I guess they couldn't help being happy times in a room like this--and with you," returned Bessie with her shy smile, which remark was promptly approved by the other girls--except Olga, who said nothing.

"You look as glum as that old barn owl at the camp, Olga," Louise Johnson told her under cover of the gay clamour of talk that followed. "For heaven's sake, do cheer up a bit. That face of yours is enough to curdle the milk of human kindness."

Olga's only response was a black scowl and a savage glance, at which Louise retreated with a shrug of her shoulders and an exasperating wink and giggle.

Within half an hour all the girls were there except Elizabeth. Olga, glooming in a corner, thought of Elizabeth crawling off alone to her room to cry. Torture would not have wrung tears from Olga's great black eyes, and she would have seen them unmoved in the eyes of any other girl; but Elizabeth--that was another thing. She glanced scornfully at the others laughing and chattering around Miss Laura, and vowed that she would never come to another of the meetings unless Elizabeth could come too. If Miss Laura, after all her talk, couldn't do something to help Elizabeth----But Miss Laura was standing before her now with a box of matches in her hand.

"I want you to light our fire to-night, Olga," she said gently. Ungraciously enough, Olga touched a match to the splinters of resinous pine on the hearth, and as the fire flashed into brightness, Miss Laura, turning out the electric lights, said, "I love the fire, but I love the candles

almost as much; so at our meetings here, we will have both." The girls were standing now in a circle broken only by the fire. Miss Laura set the three candlesticks with the bayberry candles on the floor in the centre of the circle and motioned the girls to sit down. Lightly they dropped to the floor, and Laura, touching a splinter to the fire, handed it to Frances Chapin, a grave studious High School girl who had not been at the camp. Rising on one knee, Frances repeated slowly,

"I light the light of Work, for Wohelo means work," and lighting the candle, she added,

"Wohelo means work. We glorify work, because through work we are free. We work to win, to conquer, to be masters. We work for the joy of the working and because we are free. Wohelo means work."

As Frances stepped back into the circle, Laura beckoned to Mary Hastings, the strongest, healthiest girl of them all, who, coming forward, chanted slowly in her deep rich voice,

"I light the light of Health, for Wohelo means health!"

Lighting the candle, she went on,

"Wohelo means health. We hold on to health, because through health we serve and are happy. In caring for the health and beauty of our persons we are caring for the very shrine of the Great Spirit. Wohelo means health."

As Mary went back to her place Laura laid her hand on the shoulder of Bessie Carroll, who was next her. With a glance of pleased surprise Bessie took the third taper and in her low gentle voice repeated,

"I light the light of Love, for Wohelo means love."

The room was very still as she lighted the third candle, saying,

"Wohelo means love. We love love, for love is life, and light and joy and sweetness. And love is comradeship and motherhood, and fatherhood and all dear kinship. Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten. Wohelo means love."

As she spoke the last words a strain of music, so low that it was barely audible, breathed through the room, then deepened into one clear note, and instantly the wohelo cheer rose in a joyful chorus.

After the roll-call and reports of the last meeting there was no more ceremony. Miss Laura had set the three candles back on the mantelpiece, where they burned steadily, sending out a faint spicy odor that mingled with the pleasant fragrance of the firs. The fire snapped and sang and blazed merrily, and Laura dropped down on the floor in front of it, gathering the girls closer about her.

"To-night," she began, "I want to hear about your good times--the 'fun' that every girl wants and needs. Tell me, what do you enjoy most?"

"Moving pictures," shouted Eva Bicknell, a little bundle-wrapper of fifteen.

"Dances," cried another girl.

"O yes, dances," echoed pretty Annie Pearson, her eyes shining.

"I like the roller skating at the Arcade," another declared.

"The gym and swimming pool and tennis." That was Mary Hastings.

"Hear her, will ye?" Eva Bicknell muttered. "Great chance *we* have for tennis and gym.!"

"You could have them at the Y.W.C.A. That's where I go for them when you go to your dances and picture shows," retorted Mary.

"But the picture shows is great fun, 'specially when the boys take ye in," the other flung back.

There was a laugh at that, and the little bundle-wrapper added, "an' finish up with a promenade on the avenue in the 'lectric lights."

Laura's heart sank at these frank expressions of opinion. What had she to offer that would offset picture shows, dances and "the boys" for such girls as these? But now one of the High School girls was speaking. "We have most of our good times at the school. There is always something going on--lunches or concerts or socials or dances--and once a year we get up a play. Some girl in the class generally writes the play. It's great fun."

Laura brightened at that. Here were three at least who cared for something besides picture shows. For half an hour longer she let the talk run on, and that half-hour gave her sidelights on many of the girls. Except Olga--she had not opened her lips during the discussion.

When there came a little pause, Laura spoke in a carefully careless way. "I told you, girls, that this is our Camp Fire room and I want you to feel that it belongs to you--every one of you owns a share in it. We shall have the Council meetings here every Saturday, but this room is not to be shut up all the other evenings. We may have no moving pictures, but you can come here and dance if you wish, or play games, or sing--I'm going to have a piano here soon--or if you like you can bring your sewing--your Christmas presents to make. What I want you to understand is that this room is yours, to be used for your pleasure. You haven't seen all yet."

Rising, she touched a button, and as the room was flooded with light, threw open a door. The girls, crowding after her, broke into cries of delight and admiration; for here was a white-tiled kitchen complete in all its appointments, even to a small white-enamelled gas range and a tiny refrigerator. On brass hooks hung blue and white saucepans and kettles

and spoons, and a triangular corner closet with leaded doors revealed blue and white china and glass.

"All for the Camp Fire Girls," Laura said, "and it means fudge, and popcorn, and toasted marshmallows and bacon-bats and anything else you like. You can come here yourselves every Wednesday evening, and if you wish, you can bring a friend with you to share your good times."

"Boy or girl friend?" Lena Barton's shrewd eyes twinkled as she asked the question, with a saucy tilt to her little freckled nose.

"Either," returned Laura instantly, though until that moment she had thought only of girls.

"Gee, but you're some Guardian, Miss Laura!" Lena replied.

As the girls reluctantly tore themselves away from the fascinating kitchen, two maids entered with trays of sandwiches and nutcakes, olives and candy.

"It is the first time I have had the pleasure of having you all here in my own home," Miss Laura said, "so we must break bread together."

"Gee! This beats the picture shows," Lena Barton declared. "Three cheers for our Guardian--give 'em with claps!" and both cheers and clapping were given in generous measure.

When finally there was a movement to depart, Laura gathered the girls once more about her before the fire. "I hope," she began, "you have all enjoyed this evening as much as I have----"

"We have! We *have*!" half a dozen voices broke in, and Lena Barton shrilled enthusiastically, "*More!*"

Laura smiled at them; then she glanced up at the words above the mantelpiece. "*The joy of service*," she said. "That, to me, is the heart--the very essence--of the Camp Fire idea. And while I am planning good

times and many of them for ourselves in these coming months, I wish that together we might do some of this loving service for some one beside ourselves. Think it over--think hard--and at our next Council meeting, if you are willing, we will consider what we can do, and for whom."

"You mean mish'nary work?" questioned Eva Bicknell doubtfully.

"No--at least not what you probably mean by missionary work," Laura answered.

"Christmas trees for alley folks, and that sort of thing?" ventured another.

"I mean, something for somebody else," Laura explained. "It may be an old man or woman, a child or--or anything," she ended hastily, intercepting an exchange of glances between Lena and Eva. "I just want you to think over it and have an idea to suggest at our next meeting."

"Huh! Thought the'd be nickels wanted fer somethin'," Eva Bicknell grumbled as she linked her bony little arm through Lena's when they were outside in the starlight.

"Come now--you shut up!" retorted Lena. "Miss Laura's given us a dandy time to-night, an' I ain't goin' back on her the minute I'm out of her house. An' I didn't think it of you, Eva Bicknell."

"Who's goin' back on her?" Eva's hot temper took fire at once. "Shut up yourself, Lena Barton!" she flared. "I ain't goin' back on Miss Laura any more than you are. Mebbe you're so flush that you can drop pennies an' nickels 'round promiscuous, but me--well, I ain't--that's all," and she marched on in sulky silence.

On the next Wednesday evening, some of the girls came to the Camp Fire room, and played games, which some enjoyed and others yawned over, and made fudge which all seemed to enjoy. On the next Wednesday they sang for a while, Laura accompanying them on the piano, and Rose

Anderson played for them on her violin. After that they sat on the floor before the fire and talked; but Laura was a little doubtful about these evenings. She feared that these quiet pleasures would not hold some of the girls against the alluring delights of dances and moving pictures and boys.

Meantime she did not forget Elizabeth, and on the first opportunity she went to see Mrs. Page. Sadie opened the door, and was present at the interview. She was evidently very conscious of the fact that her braids were now wound about her head and adorned with a stiff white bow that stuck out several inches on either side.

Mrs. Page received her visitor coldly, understanding that she came to intercede for Elizabeth. She said that Elizabeth's father did not want his daughter to go out evenings; that she had a good home and must be contented to stay in it "as my own children do," she ended with a glance at Sadie, who sat on the edge of a chair with much the aspect of a terrier watching a rat-hole. When Miss Laura asked if she might see Elizabeth, Sadie tossed her head and coughed behind her handkerchief, as her mother answered that Elizabeth was busy and could not leave her work.

"But wouldn't she do her work all the better if she had a little change now and then, and the companionship of other girls?" Laura urged gently.

"She has the companionship of her sister--she must be satisfied with that," was the uncompromising reply.

With a sigh, Laura rose to leave, but as she glanced at Sadie's triumphant face, she had an inspiration. The child was certainly unattractive, but perhaps all the more for that reason she ought to have a chance--a chance which might possibly mean a chance for Elizabeth too. She smiled at the girl and Laura's smile was winning enough to disarm a worse child than Sadie.

"If you do not think it best for Elizabeth to attend our Council meetings regularly, perhaps you would be willing to let her come this next Saturday and bring her sister. After the business is over, we are going to have a fudge party. I have a little upstairs kitchen just for the girls to use whenever they like. I think your daughter might enjoy it--if she cared to come--with Elizabeth."

Marvellous was the effect of those few words on Sadie. Seeing a refusal on her mother's lips, she burst out eagerly, "O mother, I want to go--I *want* to go! You *must* let me."

Taken entirely by surprise, Mrs. Page hesitated--and was lost. What Sadie wanted, her mother wanted for her, and she saw that Sadie's heart was set on accepting this invitation. "I suppose they might go, just for this once," she yielded reluctantly.

Laura allowed no time for reconsideration. "I shall expect both of them then, on Saturday," she said and turned to go. She longed to look back towards the kitchen where she felt sure that Elizabeth must have been wistfully listening, but Mrs. Page and Sadie following her to the door, gave her no chance for even a backward glance.

"Good-bye," Sadie called after her as she went down the steps, and the child's small foxy face was alight with anticipation.

Slamming the door after the caller, Sadie flew to the kitchen.

"There now, Elizabeth," she cried, "I'm going to her house next Saturday and you're going--you can just thank me for that too. Mother wouldn't have let you go if it hadn't been for me."

Elizabeth's face brightened, but there was a little shadow on it too. Of course it was better to go with Sadie than not to go at all--O, much better--but still---

When Saturday came Sadie was in a whirl of excitement. She even offered--an unheard-of concession--to wipe the supper dishes so that Elizabeth might get through her work the sooner, and she plastered a huge white bow across the back of her head, and pulled down the skirt of her dress to make it as long as possible. Sadie would gladly have thrown away three years of her life so that she might be sixteen, and really grown up that very night.

Olga was waiting at the corner for them, Miss Laura having told her that Elizabeth was to go. Her scathing glance would have had a subduing effect on most girls, but not on Sadie! Sadie did most of the talking as the three walked on together, but the other two did not care. It was enough for Elizabeth to be with Olga again, and as for Olga, she was half frightened and half glad to find a little glow of happiness deep down in her heart. She was afraid to let herself be even a little happy.

When the three entered the Camp Fire room Laura met them with an exclamation of pleasure. "We've missed you so at the Councils, Elizabeth," she said, "but it's good to have you here to-night, isn't it, Olga? And Miss Sadie is very welcome too."

Sadie smiled and executed her best bow, then drew herself up to look as tall as "Miss" Sadie should be; but the rest of the evening her eyes and ears were so busy that for once her tongue was silent. She vowed to herself that she would give her mother no peace until she--Sadie--was a really truly Camp Fire Girl like these.

When in the last hour they were all gathered on the floor before the fire, Mary Hastings asked, "Miss Laura, have you decided yet what our special work is to be--the 'service for somebody else'?" she added with a glance at the words over the mantelpiece.

"That is for you girls to decide," Laura returned. "Have you any suggestion, Mary?"

"I've been wondering if we couldn't help support some little child--maybe a sick child in a hospital, or an orphan."

"Gracious! That would take a pile of money," objected Louise Johnson, "and I'm always dead broke a week after payday."

"There are fifteen of us--it wouldn't be so much, divided up," Mary returned.

"Sixteen, Mary--you aren't going to leave me out, are you?" Miss Laura said.

"I think it would be lovely," cried Bessie Carroll, "if we could find a dear little girl baby and adopt her--make her a Camp Fire baby."

"Huh!" sniffed Lena Barton. "If you had half a dozen kids at home I reckon you wouldn't be wanting to adopt any more."

"Right you are!" added Eva Bicknell, who was the oldest of eight.

"We might 'adopt' an old lady in some Home, and visit her and do things for her," suggested Frances Chapin. "There are some lonely ones in the Old Ladies' Home where I go sometimes."

But the idea of a pretty baby appealed more to the majority of the girls.

"O, I'd rather take a baby. We could make cute little dresses for her," Rose Anderson put in, "all lacey, you know."

"Say--where's the money comin' from for the lacey dresses and things you're talkin' about?" demanded Lena Barton abruptly.

There was an instant of silence. Then Mary threw back a counter question. "How much did you spend for moving pictures and candy last week, Lena Barton?"

"I d'know--mebbe a quarter, mebbe two. What of it?" Lena retorted, her red head lifted defiantly.

"Well now--couldn't you give up two picture shows a week, for the Camp Fire baby?" Mary demanded. "If sixteen of us give ten cents a week we shall have a dollar sixty. That would be more than six dollars a month."

"Gracious! Money talks!" put in Louise. "Think of this crowd dropping over six dollars a month for picture shows and such. No wonder they're two in a block on the avenue."

"You see," Laura said, "we could easily provide for some little child, at least in part. Girls, I'd like to tell you about one I saw at the Children's Hospital yesterday. Would you care to hear about him?"

"Yes, yes, do tell us," the girls begged.

"He is no blue-eyed baby, but a very plain ordinary-looking little chap, nine years old, whose mother died a few weeks ago, leaving him entirely alone in the world. Think of it, girls, a nine-year-old boy without any one to care for him! He's lame too--but he is the bravest little soul! The nurse told me that they thought it was because he was so homesick--or rather I suppose mother-sick--that he is not getting on as well as he should."

"O, the poor little fellow!" Frances Chapin said softly, thinking of her nine-year-old brother.

"Tell us more about him, Miss Laura," Rose Anderson begged. "Did you talk with him?"

"Yes, I stayed with him for half an hour, and I promised to see him again to-morrow. He wanted a book--about soldiers. I wonder if any of you would care to go with me. You might possibly find your blue-eyed baby there; and anyhow, the children there love to have visitors--especially young ones."

Two of the High School girls spoke together. "I'd like to go."

"And I too," added Alice Reynolds, the third.

"I guess I'd like to, maybe--if there isn't anything catching there." It was pretty little Annie Pearson who said that.

"I'd love to go, but I can't," Elizabeth whispered to Olga, who frowned at her and demanded,

"What do you want to go for?"

"I'd so love to do something for that little fellow," Elizabeth answered.

"I've been lonesome too--always--till now."

"Humph!" grunted Olga, the hardness melting out of her black eyes as she looked into Elizabeth's wistful blue ones.

It was finally agreed that the three High School girls, Frances Chapin, Elsie Harding, and Alice Reynolds, with Mary Hastings, Annie Pearson, and Rose, should go with Miss Laura to the hospital.

"I c'n see kids enough at home any time," Lena Barton declared airily.

"I'd rather walk down the avenue on Sunday than go to any hospital."

"I guess I'll be excused too," said Louise Johnson. "Hospital visiting isn't exactly in my line. I've a hunch that I'd be out of place amongst a lot of sick kiddies. But I'll agree to be satisfied with any blue-eyed baby girl you and Miss Laura pick out for our Camp Fire Kid. Say, girlies"--she looked around the group--"I move we make those seven our choosing committee--Miss Laura, chairman, of course."

"But, Johnny," one girl objected, "maybe they won't find any girl to fit our pattern over at the hospital."

"It is not at all likely that we shall," Laura hastened to add, "and if we did, it would probably be one with parents or relatives to care for it after it leaves the hospital."

"Blue-eyed angel babies, with dimples, don't come in every package. I s'pose you'd want one with dimples too?" Eva Bicknell scoffed.

"O, of course, dimples. Might as well have all the ear-marks of a beauty to begin with, anyhow," giggled Louise. "She'll probably develop into a homely little freckle-faced imp by the time she's six, anyhow."

"There's worse things in the world than freckles," snapped Lena Barton, whose perky little nose was well spattered with them.

"So there are, Lena--so there are," Louise teased. "Yours will probably fade out by the time you're forty."

A cuckoo clock called the hour, and the girls reluctantly agreed that it was time to go. But first Laura, her arms around as many as she could gather into them, with a few gentle tender words brought their thoughts back to the deep meaning of the thing they were planning to do--trying to make them realize their opportunity for service, and the far-reaching results that must follow if a little life should come under their care and influence.

For once Louise was silent and thoughtful as she went away, and even Lena Barton was more subdued than usual until, at last, with a shrug of her shoulders, she flung out the vague remark,

"After all, what's the use?" and thereupon rebounded to her usual gay slangy self.

But Elizabeth went home with Miss Laura's words echoing in her heart. "I don't suppose I can do much for our Camp Fire baby," she told herself, "but there's Molly. Maybe I can do more for her and--and for Sadie and the boys--perhaps."

IX

JIM

In the first ward of the Children's Hospital the next afternoon, No. 20 lay very still--strangely still for a nine-year-old boy--watching the door. He

had watched it all day, although he knew that visitors' hours were from two to four, and none would be admitted earlier. No. 18 in the next cot asked him a question once, but No. 20 only shook his head wearily. Some of the children had books and games, but they soon tired of them, and lay idly staring about the long, sunny room, or looking out at the sky and the trees, or watching the door. Sometimes mothers or fathers came through that door, and if you hadn't any of your own, at any rate you could look at those that came to see other fellows, and sometimes these mothers had a word or a smile for others as well as their own boys. No. 20, however, didn't want any other fellow's mother to smile down at him--no indeed, that was the last thing in the world he wanted--yet. He wished sometimes, just for a moment, that there weren't any mothers to come, since the *one* could never come to him again. But they did come and smile at him, and pat his head--these mothers of the other boys--came drawn by the hungry longing in his eyes--and he set his teeth and clinched his hands under the bedclothes, and when they went away gulped down the great lump that always jumped into his throat, all in a minute--but he never cried. One day when a kind-hearted nurse asked him about his mother, he bore her questioning as long as he could, and then he struck at her fiercely and slipped right down under the bedclothes where nobody could see him; but he didn't cry, though he shook and shook for a long time after she went away.

But--Miss Laura--she was different. She didn't kiss him, nor pat him, nor ask fool questions. She just talked to him--well, the right way. And she'd promised to come again to-day. Maybe she'd forget though; people did forget things they'd promised--only somehow, she didn't look like the forgetting kind. And she was awful pretty--most the prettiest lady he had ever seen. But hospital hours were so dreadfully long! Seemed like a hundred hours since breakfast. Ah! He lifted his head and looked eagerly towards the door--somebody was coming in. O, only some other fellow's mother. He dropped down again, choking back an impatient groan that

had almost slipped out. When the next mother came in he turned his back on the door, but soon he was watching it again. A half-hour dragged wearily by; then a crowd of girls fluttered through the doorway. No. 20 gazed at them listlessly until one behind slipped past the others; then his eyes widened and his lips twitched as if they had almost a mind to smile, for here was the pretty lady coming straight to him.

"Jim" she said, shaking hands with him just as if he had been a man, "I've brought some of my girls to see you to-day. I hope you are glad to see us all, but you needn't say you are if you are not."

Jim didn't say--and Rose Anderson laughed softly. Jim flashed a glance at her, but he saw at once that it wasn't a mean laugh--just a girly giggle, and he manfully ignored it.

"I have to speak to Charley Smith over there," Miss Laura went on, "but I'll be back in a few minutes."

As she crossed to the other cot, Frances Chapin slipped into the chair by Jim's--there was only one chair between each two cots. "I think you are about nine, aren't you, Jim?" she asked.

"Goin' on ten," Jim corrected stoutly.

"I've a brother going on ten," she said.

Jim looked at her with quick interest. "Tell about him," he ordered.

"What's his name?"

"David Chapin. He's in the sixth grade----"

"So'm I--I mean I was 'fore I came here," Jim interrupted. "What else?"

"--and he's--he's going to be a Boy Scout as soon as he's twelve."

Jim's plain little face brightened into keen interest. "That's bully!" he cried. "I'm going to be a Scout soon's I'm big enough--if I can." The

wistful longing in the last words brought a mist into Frances's eyes, but Jim did not see it. He was looking at the other girls. "Any of the rest of you got brothers?" he demanded.

"I have one, but he's a big fellow, twice as old as you are," Alice Reynolds said.

"And I've six," Mary Hastings told him. "Two of them are Scouts."

"Fine!" exulted Jim. "Say--tell me what they do, all about it," he pleaded, and sitting down on the edge of his cot, Mary told him everything she could think of about the scouting.

When Miss Laura came back Jim's face was radiant. "She's been telling me about her brothers--they're Boy Scouts," he cried eagerly, pointing a stubby finger at Mary. "I wish," he looked pleadingly into Mary's eyes, "I do wish they'd come and see me; but I guess boys don't come to hospitals 'thout they have to," he ended with a sigh.

"I'll get them to come if I can," Mary promised, "but----"

"I know," Jim nodded, "I guess they won't have time. There's so many things for boys to do outdoors!"

"Jim," said Miss Laura, "there are so many things for you to do outdoors too. You must get well as fast as you can to be at them."

Jim's lips took on a most unchildlike set, and his eyes searched her face with a look she could not understand. "I--I d'know----" he said vaguely.

He could not put into words his fear and dread of the time when he must go out into some Home where he would be only one of a hundred boys and all alone in a big lonesome world. That was the black dread that weighed on Jim's heart night and day. He had seen that long procession of girls and boys from the Orphan Asylum going back from church on Sundays, the girls all in white dresses, the boys in blue denim suits, all

just alike except for size. He had peeped through knotholes in the high fence that surrounded the Asylum yard too, and had seen the boys playing there on weekdays; and some not playing, but standing off by themselves looking so awful lonesome. Jim had always pitied those lonesome-looking ones. More than once he had poked a stick of chewing-gum through a knothole to one of them--a little chap with frightened blue eyes. Jim felt that he'd almost rather die than go to the Asylum; and he'd heard the nurse tell Charley Smith's mother that he'd have to go there when he got well. That was why Jim was in no hurry to get well.

The girls all shook hands with him before they went off to search the other wards for their blue-eyed baby. Miss Laura did not go with the girls; she stayed with Jim, and somehow, before long, he was telling her all about the Asylum boys and how he dreaded to get well and go there to live till he was fourteen. And, unconsciously, as he told it all, his stubby little fingers crept into Miss Laura's hand that closed over them with a warm pressure very comforting to Jim.

And then--then a wonderful thing happened, for Miss Laura put her head down close to his and whispered, "Jim, you shall never go to the Asylum, I promise you that. If you will try very hard to get well, I'll find a home for you somewhere, and I'll take care of you until you can take care of yourself."

Jim caught his breath and his eyes seemed looking through hers deep into her heart, to see if this incredible thing could be true. What little colour there was in his face faded slowly out of it and his lips quivered as he whispered, "You--you ain't--jest foolin'? You mean it, honest Injun?"

"Yes, Jim--honest."

He struggled to a sitting posture. "Cross your heart!" he ordered breathlessly.

She made the sign that children make. "Cross my heart, Jim. You are my boy now," she said.

With a long, happy breath Jim fell back on his pillow. His eyes began to shine, and a spot of red burned in each thin cheek. "O gee!" he cried exultantly, and again, "O gee! I'll get well in a hurry now, Miss Laura." Then eagerly, "Where'll I live?"

"I don't know yet. I'll find a place," she promised.

He nodded, happily content just then to leave that in her hands.

"An' I'll grow big soon," he crowed, "and I can earn a lot of money when I'm well, carryin' papers an'--an' other ways. An' you'll let me be a Boy Scout soon's I'm big enough, an' a soldier when I get over being lame?"

Laura nodded, and again Jim drew a long rapturous breath. When Laura went away his eyes followed her, and as from the door she looked back at him, he waved his hand to her and then settled down on his pillow to dream happy waking dreams. He was somebody's boy once more.

Laura found the girls waiting for her in the reception room.

"Did you find your blue-eyed baby?" she asked.

"We found one----" Alice Reynolds began, and Rose broke in,

"But, O Miss Laura, her mother was with her and she wouldn't hear of giving her up. I don't wonder--such a darling as she is!"

"You can try at the Orphan Asylum," Miss Laura said, the words sending her thoughts back in a flash to Jim.

"Miss Laura, I wish we could have Jim. I think he's a dear!" Mary Hastings said as they left the hospital.

"Jim's pre-empted. He's my boy now," Laura answered quickly.

"O Miss Laura, I wanted him too for our Camp Fire child," Frances said. "Are you really going to adopt him--have him live with you?"

"I don't know, Frances, about the living. When I found that he was fairly dying of loneliness and dread of the Orphan Asylum, I just had to do something; so I told him he should be my boy and I would take care of him. I know my father won't mind the expense, but he may object to having the boy live with us. Of course, if he does I shall find a good home for him elsewhere."

"But, Miss Laura, why can't we all 'adopt' him?" Frances pleaded. "I'd so much rather have him than any baby. And there are always people ready to adopt pretty blue-eyed baby girls, but they don't want just boys--like Jim."

"That's true," Alice Reynolds agreed. "My mother is a director at the Orphan Asylum, and she says nine out of ten who go there for a child to adopt, want a pretty baby girl."

"But you can find some other boy for the Camp Fire," Miss Laura returned.

"Not another Jim. Please share him with us, anyhow, Miss Laura," Alice urged.

"I don't want to be selfish about it," Laura replied, "but somehow Jim has crept into my heart and I thought I would take him for my own special Camp Fire 'service.' And perhaps the other girls won't be willing to give up their pretty baby."

"I--I'd hate to, though I like Jim too," Rose admitted.

"You couldn't make pretty lacey dresses for Jim," Laura reminded her with a little laugh. "Rose is hankering for a live doll to dress, girls, so you'd better wait and see what the others say about it."

"When can Jim leave the hospital?" Alice inquired.

"To judge from his face when I left him, he will get well quickly, now," Miss Laura answered.

And he did. The next time she went to see him, he welcomed her with a beaming smile. "I'm getting well," he exulted. "She says I can sit up to-morrow," he nodded towards the nurse.

"He is certainly getting better," the nurse agreed. "He has seemed like another boy since Sunday. How did you work such magic, Miss Haven?"

Laura looked at Jim and his eyes met hers steadily. "Hasn't he told you?" she asked the nurse.

"He has told me nothing."

Laura smiled at him as she explained, "Jim is my boy now--we agreed on that, Sunday. When he leaves the hospital he is coming to me."

"Jim, I congratulate you. You are a lucky boy," said the nurse, who knew all about Judge Haven and his daughter.

"I think I too am to be congratulated," said Laura quickly, and the nurse nodded.

"Yes, Jim is a good boy," she answered. Then she went away and left the two together. This time Jim did not talk very much. It was enough for him to have his pretty lady where he could look at her, and be sure it was not all a dream.

Not many days later, after a telephone conference with the nurse, Laura went to the hospital again. She found the boy lying there with a look of patient endurance in his eyes, but they widened with half-incredulous joy when she told him that she had come to take him away.

"Not--not *now*!" he cried out, with a little break in his voice.

"Yes, now--just as you are. We are going to wrap you in a blanket and put you into a carriage, and before you have time to get tired we shall be home."

"Home!" echoed Jim, his eyes shining.

"What makes you look so sober?" Miss Laura asked him as they drove away. "You aren't sorry to leave the hospital?"

"Sorry?" Jim gave a shaky little laugh, then suddenly was grave again. "Yes, I'm sorry, but it's for all the other fellows that nobody's coming for," he explained.

"I wish I could have taken them all home with us," Laura answered quickly. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Jim. If you'll get well very fast, maybe you and I can give a little Christmas party in your ward, to those other boys who have to stay there."

"Hang up stockin's an'--an' a tree an' all?" Jim questioned breathlessly.

"Yes. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Gee!" was Jim's rapturous comment. "You bet I'll get well fast--if I can," the afterthought in a lower tone.

The room Laura had prepared for the boy had been a nursery, and had a frieze, representing in gay colours the old Mother Goose stories. Jim was put on a cot beside the open fire, where he lay very still, but it was not the dull hopeless stillness of the hospital. Now he was resting, and his eyes travelled happily along the wall as he picked out the old familiar characters.

"Makes me feel like a little kid--seeing all those," he said, pointing at them.

The thin white face and small figure under the bedclothes looked like a very "little kid" still, Laura thought. The gray eyes swept over the large

sunny room and then back to Miss Laura's face, and suddenly Jim's lips trembled.

"I--I--I think you're *bully*!" he broke out, and instantly turned his face to the wall and was still again. Laura slipped quietly out of the room. When she returned a few minutes later, she brought a supper tray.

"You and I are going to have supper here to-night, Jim," she announced cheerfully, "because my father is away, and I should be lonesome all alone downstairs and you might be lonesome up here. You must have a famous appetite, you know, if you are to get well and strong for that Christmas party at the hospital."

"I'm hungry, all right," Jim declared, his eyes lingering on the tempting food so daintily served; but after all he did not eat very much.

After supper he lay quietly watching the leaping flames for a long time. Suddenly he broke the silence with a question.

"I'll be back there then?"

"Back where, Jim? I don't understand," Miss Laura said.

"At the hospital--when we have that Christmas party."

"Oh. Why, yes, of course, you and I will both be there."

"Yes, but I mean--I mean----" Jim's eyes were very anxious, "will I be back there to stay, or where will I be stayin'?"

Laura's hand dropped softly over one of his and held it in a warm clasp.

"No, Jim, you won't go back there to stay--ever--not if you do your best to get well, as of course you are going to. I told you I would find a good home for you and I will, but there's plenty of time to think of that before your two weeks here are over."

"You're the--the best ever, Miss Laura," Jim said. "I--I didn't s'pose," he stumbled on, trying to put his feeling into words, "ladies like you ever--cared about boys that get left out of things--like I have."

Laura longed to put her arms about him and hold him close, but there was something about the sturdy little fellow that warned her, so, waiting a moment to steady her voice, she answered, "O yes, there are many that care and do all they can; but you see there are so very many little fellows that--get left out, Jim."

Jim nodded, his face very sober. "I wonder why," he said, voicing the world-old query.

When she had settled him for the night, she stood looking down at the dark head on the pillow. "Shall I put the light out, or leave it?" she asked.

"Just as you like, Miss Laura," he said, but she thought there was a little anxiety in his eyes.

"It makes no difference to me, of course. I want it whichever way you like best. I know you are not afraid of the dark."

A moment's silence, then in a very small voice, "Yes--I am--Miss Laura."

"*Afraid!*" Miss Laura caught herself up quickly.

"Yes'm," said Jim in a still smaller voice, his eyes hidden now.

"O--then I'll leave the light, of course." But there was just a shade of disappointment in Miss Laura's voice and Jim caught it. "Good-night, dear," she added, with a light touch on the straight brown hair.

"G'night," came in a muffled voice from the pillow.

Laura turned away, but before she reached the stairs the boy called her. She went back at once.

"What is it, Jim? Do you want anything?"

"Yes'm, the light. I guess--you better put it out."

"Not if you are afraid in the dark, Jim."

"Yes, Miss Laura, that's why."

"But I don't understand. Can't you tell me?" she urged gently.

Jim gulped down a troublesome something in his throat before he said in a whisper, "Put your head down close, Miss Laura."

She turned out the light and as she dropped down beside the bed, a small arm slipped around her neck and a husky little voice whispered in her ear, "It's 'cause I'm 'fraid inside that I mustn't have the light left." Another gulp. "Mother--she said you wasn't a coward just 'cause you was 'fraid inside, but only when you let the 'fraid get out into the things you *do*. She said lots of brave men were 'fraid inside sometimes. An'--an' she said I mustn't ever be a coward nor tell lies, an' I promised--cross my heart--I wouldn't. So that's why, Miss Laura."

Again Laura longed to hug the little fellow and kiss him as his mother would have done, but she said only,

"Yes, Jim, I quite understand now, and I know you will never be a coward. Here's the bell, you know. You can press the button if you want anything, and the maid sleeps in the next room. She'll be up in a few minutes."

"Yes'm." A little drowsiness was creeping into Jim's voice already.

"Good-night, dear."

"Good-night," Jim murmured and Laura went away, but she left the door open into the lighted hall, and when she slipped back a little later the boy was asleep.

When the other Camp Fire Girls learned about "Miss Laura's boy" they were all interested in him, and begged that he might come to the next Council meeting. Jim was sitting up most of the day now, and his wheelchair was rolled into the room after all the girls had come. He was dressed and sat up very straight, but though he was much better, his face was still very thin and white.

"All but one of my girls are here to-night, Jim," Miss Laura told him. "I'm going to introduce you to them and see how many of the names you can remember."

"Why isn't that other one here?" he demanded.

"She couldn't come this time," Laura said with a glance at Olga, sitting grave and silent a little apart from the others.

The girls gathered about the wheelchair and Jim held out his hand to each one as Laura mentioned her name. His gray eyes searched each face, but he said nothing until Lena Barton flung him a careless nod and would have passed on, but he caught her hand and laughed up into the freckled face with the bunch of red frizzes puffed out on each side in the "latest moment" fashion.

"Hello, Carrots," he called in the tone of jovial good-fellowship, "I like you, 'cause you look like a fellow I used to sit with in school. His name was Barton too--Jo Barton. O, I say," leaning forward eagerly, "mebbe he's your brother?"

"You're right, kiddie--he's one of the bunch," Lena answered, her face softening as she looked down into the eager gray eyes.

"Gee! Jo's sister!" Jim repeated. "I wish Jo was here too. I s'pose," he glanced at Miss Laura, "you couldn't squeeze in just one more boy?"

Laura shook her head. "Not into these meetings. But you can invite Lena's brother to come and see you, if you like."

"O bully!" Jim cried out and turned again to Lena. "You tell him, won't you?"

"I will, sure," she promised, and Jim reluctantly released her hand.

The girls begged that he might stay, and though Jim's tongue was silent his eyes pleaded too, so Miss Laura conceded, "Just for a while then, if you'll be very quiet so as not to get too tired," and with a contented smile Jim leaned back against his cushions and looked and listened. When the girls chanted the Fire Ode his eyes widened with pleasure and he listened with keen interest to the recital of "gentle deeds." Even Olga gave one this time. Jim's eyes studied her grave face, his own almost as grave, and when later she passed his chair, he caught her dress and said very low, "Put down your head. I want to ask you something."

Olga impatiently jerked her dress from his grasp, but something in his eyes held her against her will, and under cover of a burst of laughter from another group, she leaned over the wheelchair and ungraciously enough asked what he wanted. Jim's eyes, very earnest and serious now, were looking straight into hers.

"I know what makes you keep away from the others and look so--so--dif'rent. You're lonesome like I was at the hospital. Is it your mother, too?"

Olga's face went dead white and for an instant her eyes flamed so fiercely that the boy shrank away with a little gasp of fear. But the next moment she was looking at him with eyes full of tears--a long silent look--then, without a word, she was gone.

The first time that Jim came downstairs to dinner he was very shy and spoke only in answer to a question. But his awe of Judge Haven and the servants soon wore off, and his questions and comments began to interest the judge. When one evening after dinner Laura was called to the telephone, the judge laid aside his paper and called the boy to him. Jim

promptly limped across the room and stood at the judge's knee, his gray eyes looking steadily into the keen blue ones above him.

"Are you having a good time here?" the judge began.

"O, splendid!"

"And you are almost well, aren't you?"

"Almost well," Jim assented, a little shadow of anxiety creeping into the gray eyes.

"Let me see--how many days have you been here?"

Jim answered instantly, "Nine. I've got five more," this last very soberly.

"Five more?" the judge questioned.

Jim nodded gravely. "Miss Laura said I could stay here two weeks, you know."

"Oh! And then what--back to the hospital?"

"O no!" Jim was very positive about that. "No, I don't know where I'll be after the five days. I--I kind o' wish I did. It would be--settled, you know. But," his face brightening, "but of course, it will be a nice place, because Miss Laura said she'd find me a good home somewhere, and she don't ever forget her promises. And besides, I'm going to be her boy just the same when I go away from here--she promised that too."

The judge nodded, his eyes studying the small earnest face.

"Miss Laura must find that good home right away," he said. "Of course you want to know where you are going."

"I hope she'll be the kind that likes boys," Jim said after a thoughtful pause. "Do you think she will?"

"Who?"

"The woman in that good home. They don't all, you know. Some of 'em think boys are dreadful noisy and bothering, and some think they eat too much. I eat a lot sometimes----" he ended with an anxious frown.

The judge found it necessary just then to put his hand over his eyes. He muttered something about the light hurting them, and then Laura came in and told Jim it was bedtime. He said good-night, holding out his small stubby hand. The judge's big one grasped it and held it a moment.

"We had a nice talk, didn't we?" Jim said, and with the smile that made his homely little face radiant for a moment, he added, "It sure is nice to talk with a *man*," and he went off wondering what the judge was laughing about.

He was not laughing when Laura came downstairs again after tucking up the boy in bed. She so hated to turn out the light and leave him in the dark, but she always did it. Now she told her father what Jim had said about that the first night.

The judge made no comment, but after a moment he remarked, "The boy is rather worried about the home you are to find for him. It ought to be settled. Have you any place in view?"

"No. To tell the truth, father, I can't bear to have him go away. Would you mind if I keep him here a while longer? You are so much away, and he is company for me, and very little trouble. I shall miss him dreadfully when he goes."

"Of course I don't mind," her father said. "Only, Laura, is it fair to keep him here--fair to him, I mean? The longer he stays the harder it will be for him to go to a strange place."

"I suppose you are right," Laura admitted with a sigh, "and I must find the home for him at once."

"But be sure it is a good place, and with a woman who will 'mother' him," the judge added. "Poor little chap--only nine and lame, and alone in the world. It's hard lines."

"It would seem so," his daughter admitted, "and yet, Jim is such a brave honest little fellow, and he has such a gift for making friends, that perhaps he is not so badly handicapped, after all. I shall miss him dreadfully when he leaves us."

X

SADIE PAGE

But the finding of a satisfactory home for the boy proved to be no easy task. At the end of the two weeks Laura was still carrying on the quest. When she told Jim that he was to stay with her another week the look in his eyes brought the tears into hers. For the first time she dared to put her arms about him and hold him close, and Jim stayed there, his head on her shoulder, trying his best to swallow the lump in his throat. When he lifted his head he said in a shaky voice, "G--gee! But I'm glad!"

"Not a bit gladder than I am, Jim," Laura said, "and now we must have a bit of a celebration to-night. Father is dining out, so we'll have supper up in the nursery and we'll invite somebody. Who shall it be?"

She thought he would say Jo Barton, but instead he said, "Olga."

"Olga?" she repeated doubtfully. "I'm not at all sure that she will come, but I'll ask her. I'll write a note now and send it to the place where she works."

Jim gave a little happy skip. He ignored his lameness so absolutely that often Laura too almost forgot it. "I guess she'll come," he said in the singing voice he used when he was especially pleased.

Olga was just starting for home when the note reached her. She scowled as she read.

"Dear Olga: Jim wants you to come to supper with us--just with him and me--to-night at 6:30. I shall be very glad if you will, for, aside from the pleasure of having you with us, I want to talk over with you something that concerns Elizabeth. Please don't fail us.

"Yours faithfully,

"Laura E. Haven."

Olga read the note twice, her eyes lingering on the words "something that concerns Elizabeth." But for those words she would have refused the invitation, but she had not seen Elizabeth for some time, and did not know whether she was sick or well. She did not want to go to supper with Miss Laura and Jim. Jim was well enough--her face softened a little as she thought of him, but she did not want to see him to-night. If there was something to be done for Elizabeth, however----Reluctantly she turned towards Wyoming Avenue.

Jim was watching for her at the window and ran to open the door before the servant could get there.

"I knew you'd come!" he crowed, flashing a smile up into her sombre face. "I told Miss Laura you would."

"What made you so sure, Jim?" she asked curiously.

"O 'cause. I knew you would. I wanted you *hard*, and when you want things hard they come--sometimes," Jim said, the triumph dropping out of his voice with the last word.

Jim did most of the talking during supper, Laura throwing in a word now and then, and leaving Olga to speak or be silent, as she chose. She wondered what it was in Olga that attracted the boy, for he seemed quite at ease with her, taking it for granted that she liked to be there and was interested in what interested him; and although Olga was so silent and grave, there was a friendly light in her eyes when she looked at Jim, and she did not push him away when he leaned on her knee and once even against her shoulder, as the three of them gathered about the fire after supper. But when he had gone to bed, Olga began at once.

"Miss Laura, what about Elizabeth?"

"You told me," Miss Laura returned, "that you thought Sadie had something to do with her absence from the Council meetings."

Olga's face hardened. "I'm sure of it. She's a hateful little cat--that Sadie. I'm sure she is determined that Elizabeth shall not come here unless she comes too."

"I wonder why the child is so eager to come," Miss Laura said thoughtfully.

"Oh!" Olga flung out impatiently. "She's bewitched over the Camp Fire dresses, and headbands, and all the other toggery, and she likes to be with older girls. She's just set her heart on being a Camp Fire Girl and she's determined that if she can't be, Elizabeth shan't be either--that's all there is about it."

"Then perhaps we'd better admit her."

Olga stared in amazement and wrath. "Into *our* Camp Fire?"

Miss Laura nodded.

"But we don't want her, a hateful little snake in the grass like that!" the girl flung out angrily. "If you knew the way she treats Elizabeth--like the dirt under her feet!"

"I know. Her face shows what she is," Laura admitted.

"Well--do you want a girl like that in your Camp Fire?"

"Yes," Laura's voice was very low and gentle, "yes, I want any kind of girl--that the Camp Fire can help."

"The other girls won't want her," Olga declared.

"They want Elizabeth, and you think they cannot have her without having Sadie."

Olga sat staring into the fire, her black brows meeting in a moody scowl.

"Olga, what is the Camp Fire for?" Laura asked presently.

"For? Why----" Olga paused, a new thought dawning in her dark eyes.

Laura answered as if she had spoken it. "Yes, the Camp Fire is to help any girl in any way possible. Not only to help weak girls to grow strong, and timid girls to grow brave, and helpless girls to become useful, and lonely girls to find friends and social opportunities--it is for all these things, but for more--much more besides. It is to show selfish, narrow-minded girls--like that poor little Sadie--the beauty of unselfishness and generosity and thoughtful kindness to others. Don't you see that we have no right to refuse to give Sadie her chance just because she doesn't know any better than to be disagreeable?"

Again Olga was silent, and the clock had ticked away full ten minutes before Laura spoke again. "You want Elizabeth to come to our meetings?"

"It's the only pleasure she has in the world--coming to them," Olga returned.

"I know, and I want her to come just as much as you do," Miss Laura said, "but I think you are the only one who can bring it about."

"How can I?"

"There is a way--I think--but it will be a very unpleasant one for you. It will call for a large patience, and perseverance, and determination."

Olga, searching Miss Laura's face, cried out, "You mean--*Sadie*!"

"Yes, I mean Sadie. Olga, do you care enough for Elizabeth to do this very hard thing for her? You did so much for her at the Camp! It was you who put hope and courage and will-power into her and helped her to find health. But she still needs you, and she needs what the Camp Fire can

give her. She cannot have either, it seems, unless we take Sadie too, and Sadie needs what the Camp Fire can give quite as much--in a different way--as Elizabeth did or does. Olga, are you willing for Elizabeth's sake to do your utmost for Sadie--so that the other girls will take her in? They wouldn't do it as she is now, you know."

Olga pondered over that and Laura left her to her own thoughts. This thing meant much to the lives of three girls--this one of the three must not be hurried. But she studied the dark face, reading there some of the conflicting thoughts passing through the girl's mind. After a long time Olga threw back her head and spoke.

"I shall *hate* it, but I'll do it."

Laura shook her head doubtfully. "Sadie is keen--sharp. If you hate her she will know it, and you'll make no headway with her."

"I know." Olga gave a rueful little laugh. "She's sharp as needles--that's the one good thing about her. I shall have to start with that and not pretend--anything. It wouldn't be any use. I shall tell her plainly that I'll help her get into our Camp Fire on condition that she treats Elizabeth as she ought and gets her out to our meetings. I'll make a square bargain with her. Maybe she won't agree, but I think she will, and if she agrees, I think she'll do her part."

Laura drew a long breath of relief. "I am so glad, Olga--glad for Elizabeth and for Sadie both," and in her heart she added, "and for you too, Olga--O, for you too!"

So the very next evening Olga stood again at the door which Sadie had slammed in her face, and as before it was Sadie who answered her ring.

"You can't see Elizabeth," she began with a flirt, but Olga said quietly,

"I came to see you this time."

"I don't believe it," Sadie flung back at her.

"I want to talk with you," Olga persisted. "Can you walk a little way with me?"

Sadie's small black eyes seemed to bore like gimlets into the eyes of the other girl, but curiosity got the better of suspicion after a minute and saying, "Well, wait till I get my things, then," she left Olga on the steps till she returned with her coat and hat on.

"Now, what is it?" she demanded as the two walked down the street.

"Do you want to be a Camp Fire Girl?" Olga began.

"What if I do?" Sadie returned suspiciously.

"You can be if you like."

"In your Camp Fire--the Busy Corner one?"

"Yes."

"How can I? You said I couldn't before."

"There wasn't any vacancy then, but one of our girls has gone to Baltimore, so there is a chance for some one in her place."

Sadie's breath came quickly, and the suspicion and sharpness had dropped out of her voice as she asked eagerly, "Will Miss Laura let me join--truly?"

"Yes----"

"Yes--what?" Sadie demanded, the sharpness again in evidence.

Olga faced her steadily. "Sadie, I'm going to put it to you straight, for if you join, you've got to understand exactly how it is."

"I know," Sadie broke out angrily, "you're just letting me in so's to get 'Lizabeth. You can't fool me, Olga Priest."

"I know it, and I'm not trying to," Olga answered quietly. "Now listen to me, Sadie. *I* wouldn't have let you join only, as you say, to get Elizabeth. But Miss Laura wants you for yourself too."

"D she say so?" Sadie demanded eagerly.

"Yes, she said so." Again Olga looked straight into the sharp little suspicious face of the younger girl. "Sadie, you're no fool. I wonder if you've grit enough to listen to some very plain facts--things that you won't like to hear. Because you've got to understand and do your part, or else you'll get no pleasure of our Camp Fire if you do join. Are you game, Sadie Page?"

The eyes of the two met in a long look and neither wavered. Finally Sadie said sulkily, "Yes, I'm game. Of course, it's something hateful, but--go ahead. I'm listening."

"No, it isn't hateful--at least, I don't mean it so," and actually Olga was astonished to find now that she no longer hated this girl. "I'm just trying to do the best I can for you. Of course, if you come in, Elizabeth, too, must come to all the meetings; but I'll help you, Sadie, just as I helped her, to win honours, and I'll teach you to do the craft work, and to meet the Fire Maker's tests later. I'll do everything I can for you, Sadie."

"Will you show me how to make the Camp Fire dress and the bead headbands and all that?" Sadie demanded breathlessly.

"Yes--all that."

"O, goody!" Sadie gave a little gleeful skip. "I know I can learn--I *know* I can--better'n 'Lizabeth."

Then, seeing Olga's frown, Sadie added hastily, "But 'Lizabeth can learn to do some of them, I guess, too."

"Elizabeth can learn if she has half a chance," Olga said. "She works so hard at home that she is too tired to learn other things quickly."

Sadie shot an angry glance at the other girl's face, but she managed with an effort to hold back the sharp words she plainly longed to fling out. She was silent a moment, then she asked, "You said 'things that I wouldn't like.' What are they?"

"Sadie--did you know that you can be extremely disagreeable without half trying?" Olga asked very quietly.

"I d'know what you mean." Sadie's face darkened, and her voice was sulky and defiant.

"I wonder if you really don't," Olga said, looking at her thoughtfully.

"But it's true, Sadie. You have hateful little ways of speaking and doing things. They're only habits--you can break yourself of them, and quick and bright as you are, you'll find that the girls--our Camp Fire Girls--will like you and take you right in as soon as you do drop those ugly nagging ways. You know, Sadie, you can't ever be really happy yourself until you try to make other people happy----"

Suddenly realising what she was saying, Olga stopped short. Sadie's eyes saw the change in her face, and Sadie's sharp voice demanded instantly, "What's the matter?"

Olga answered with a frankness that surprised herself, no less than the younger girl, "Sadie, it just came to me that you and I are in the same box. I've not been trying to make others happy any more than you have----"

"No," Sadie broke in, "I was going to tell you that soon as I got a chance."

Olga's lips twisted in a wry smile as she went on, "--so you see you and I both have something to do in ourselves. Maybe we can help each other? What do you say? Shall we watch and help each other? I'll remind you when you snap and snarl, and you----"

"I'll remind you when you sulk and glower," Sadie retorted in impish glee. "Maybe we *can* work it that way."

"All right, it's a bargain then?" Olga held out her hand and Sadie's thin nervous fingers clasped it promptly. The child's cheeks were flushed and her small black eyes were shining.

"I can learn fast if I want to," she boasted. "I'm going to make me a silver bracelet like Miss Laura's and a pin; and I'll have lovely embroidery on my Camp Fire dress. I *love* pretty things like those--don't you?"

Olga shook her head. "No, I don't care for them," she returned; but as she spoke there flashed into her mind some words Mrs. Royall had spoken at one of the Council meetings--"Seek beauty in everything--appreciate it, create it, for yourself and for others." Sadie was seeking beauty, even though for her it meant as yet merely personal adornment, and she--Olga--deep down in her heart had been cherishing a scorn for all such beauty. She put the thought aside for future consideration as she said, "Then, Sadie, you and Elizabeth will be at Miss Laura's next Saturday?"

"I rather guess we *will*!" Sadie answered emphatically.

"You don't have to ask your mother about it?"

Sadie gave a scornful little flirt. "Mother! She always does what I want. We'll be there." And then, with a burst of generosity, she added, "You can see Elizabeth, for a minute, if you want to--now."

But again Olga shook her head. "Tell her I'll stop for her and you Saturday," she said. "Good-bye, Sadie."

"Good-bye," Sadie echoed, turning towards her own door; but the next minute she was clutching eagerly at Olga's sleeve. "Say--tell Miss Laura to be sure and have my silver ring ready for me as soon's I join," she cried. "You won't forget, Olga?"

"I won't forget," Olga assured her.

XI

BOYS AND OLD LADIES

The change into a home atmosphere and the loving care with which he was surrounded, worked wonders in Jim, and when the judge decided that he should remain where he was, and not be sent to any other home, the boy grew stronger by the hour. Then Laura had her hands full to keep him happily occupied; for after a while, in spite of auto rides and visits to the Zoo--in spite of books and games and picture puzzles--sometimes she thought he seemed not quite happy, and she puzzled over the problem, wondering what she had left undone. When one day she found him watching some boys playing in a vacant lot, the wistful longing in his eyes was a revelation to her.

"Of course, it is boys he is longing for--boys and out-of-door fun. I ought to have known," she said to herself, and at once she called Elsie Harding on the telephone.

"Will you ask your brother Jack if he will come here Saturday morning and see Jim? Tell him it is a chance for his 'one kindness,' a kindness that will mean a great deal to my boy."

"I'll tell him," Elsie promised. "I know he'll be glad to go if he can."

Laura said nothing to Jim, but when Jack Harding appeared, she took him upstairs at once. Jim was standing at the window, watching two boys and a puppy in a neighbouring yard. He glanced listlessly over his shoulder as the door opened, but at sight of a boy in Scout uniform, he hurried across to him, crying out,

"My! But it's good to see a boy!" Then he glanced at Laura, the colour flaming in his face. Would she mind? But she was smiling at him, and looking almost as happy as he felt.

"This is Jack Harding, Elsie's brother," she said, "and, Jack, this is my boy Jim. I hope he can persuade you to stay to lunch with him." Then she shut the door and left the two together.

When she went back at noon, she found the boys deep in the mysteries of knots. Jim looked up, his homely little face full of pride.

"Jack is learning me to tie all the different knots," he cried, "and he's going to learn me ['teach,' corrected Jack softly]--yes, teach me everything I'll have to know before I can be a Scout. Jack's a second class Scout--see his badge? We've had a bully time, haven't we, Jack?"

Suddenly his head went down and his heels flew into the air as he turned a somersault. Coming right end upwards again, he looked at Laura with a doubtful grin. "I--I didn't mean to do that," he stammered. "It--just did itself--like----"

Jack's quick laugh rang out then. "I know. You had to get it out of your system, didn't you?" he said with full understanding.

That was a red-letter day to Jim. He kept his visitor until the last possible moment, and stood at the window looking after him till the straight little figure in khaki swung around a corner and was gone. Then with a long happy breath he turned to Laura and said, half apologetically, half appealingly, "You see a fellow gets kind o' hungry for boys, sometimes. You don't mind, do you, Miss Laura?"

"No, indeed, Jim. I get hungry for girls the same way--it's all right," she assured him. But she made up her mind that Jim should not get *so* hungry for boys again--she would see to that.

After a moment he asked thoughtfully, "Why can't boys be Scouts till they're twelve, Miss Laura?"

"I think because younger boys could not go on the long tramps."

"Oh!" Jim thought that over and finally admitted, "Yes, I guess that's it." A little later he asked anxiously, "Do you s'pose they'd let a fellow join when he's twelve even if he is just a *little* lame?"

"O, I hope so, Jim," Laura answered quickly.

"But you ain't sure. Jack wasn't sure, but he guessed they would." Jim pondered a while in silence, then he broke out again, "Seems to me the only way is for me to get this leg cured. I can't be shut out of things always just 'cause of that, can I now, Miss Laura?"

"Nothing can shut you out of the best things, Jim."

The boy looked up at her, tipping his round head till he reminded her of an uncommonly wise sparrow. "I don't *quite* know what you mean," he said in a doubtful tone.

"You like stories of men who have done splendid brave things, don't you?" Laura asked.

Jim nodded, his eyes searching her face.

"But some of the bravest men have never been able to fight or do the things you love to hear about."

"How did they be brave then?" Jim demanded.

"They were brave because they endured very, very hard things and never whimpered."

"What's whimpered?"

"To whimper is to cry or complain--or be sorry for yourself."

Jim studied over that; then coming close to Laura, he looked straight into her eyes. "You mean that I mustn't talk about that?" He touched his lame leg.

"It would be better not, if you can help it," she said very gently.

"I got to help it then, 'cause, of course, I've got to be brave. And mebbe if I get strong as--as anything, they'll let me join the Scouts when I'm twelve even--even if I ain't quite such a good walker as the rest of 'em. Don't you think they *might*, Miss Laura?"

"Yes, Jim, I think they might," she agreed hastily. Who could say "No" to such pleading eyes?

Jim had been teasing to go to school, and when at the next Camp Fire meeting, Lena Barton told him that Jo had been sent to an outdoor school, Jim wanted to go there too.

"Take him to the doctor and see what he thinks about it," the judge advised, and to Jim's delight the doctor said that it was just the place for him.

"Let him sleep out of doors too for a year," the doctor added. "It will do him a world of good."

So the next day Miss Laura went with him to the school, Jim limping gaily along at her side, and chuckling to himself as he thought how "s'prised" Jo would be to see him there.

Jo undoubtedly was surprised. He was a thin little chap, freckled and red-haired like his sister, and he welcomed his old comrade with a wide friendly grin.

Jim thought it a very queer-looking school, with teacher and pupils all wearing warm coats, mittens, and hoods or caps, and all with their feet hidden in big woolen bags. There was no fire, of course, and all the windows were wide open.

"But what a happy-looking crowd it is!" Laura said, and the teacher answered,

"They are the happiest children I ever taught, and they learn so easily! They get on much faster than most of the children in other schools of the same grade. We give them luncheon here--plain nourishing things which the doctor orders--and," she lowered her voice, "that means a deal to some who come from poor homes where there is not too much to eat."

"We shall gladly pay for Jim," Laura said quickly, "enough for him and some of the others too."

So Jim's outdoor life began. There was a covered porch adjoining the old nursery, and the judge had the end boarded up to protect the boy's cot from snow or rain; and there, in a warm sleeping-bag, with a wool cap over his ears, and a little fox terrier cuddled down beside him for company, Jim slept through all the winter weather.

He and the judge were great chums now. It would be hard to say which most enjoyed the half-hour they spent together before Laura carried the boy off to bed. And as for Laura--she often wondered how she had ever gotten on without Jim. He filled the big house with life, and she didn't at all mind the noise and disorder that he brought into it. He whistled now from morning till night, and his pockets were perfect catch-alls. Sometimes they were stuck together with chewing-gum or molasses candy, and sometimes they were soaked with wet sponges, and his hands--she counted one Saturday, thirteen times that she sent him to wash them between getting up and bedtime.

The girls always wanted Jim at their Camp Fire meetings, for a part of the time at least. As "Miss Laura's boy" they felt that in a way he belonged to them too, and Jim was very proud and happy to make one of the company.

"I'm going to be a Camp Fire boy until I'm big enough to be a Scout, if you'll all let me," he told the girls one night, and they all gave him the most cordial of welcomes.

He was sitting between Olga and Elizabeth, when the girls were talking about some of the babies they had found.

"We never find one that is just right," Rose Parsons complained. "Or if the baby is what we would like, there is always some one that wants to keep it."

"I'm glad of it," Lena Barton flung out. "It was silly of us to think of taking a baby, anyhow. We better just help out somewhere--maybe with some older kid." Her red-brown eyes flashed a glance at Jim.

It was then that Frances Chapin broke in earnestly, "O girls, I do so wish you'd take one of the old ladies at the Home! They need our help quite as much as the babies--more, I sometimes think, for they are so old and tired, and they've such a little time to--to have things done for them. The babies have chances, but the chances of these old ladies are almost over. There's one--Mrs. Barlow--I'm sure you couldn't help loving her--she is so gentle and patient and uncomplaining, although she cannot see to sew or read, and cannot go out alone. She has her board and room at the Home of course, but clothes are not provided, and she hasn't any money at all. Just think of never having a dollar to buy anything with! And the money we could give would buy so many of the things she needs, and it would make her so happy to have us run in and see her now and then. There are so many of us that no one would have to go often, and she loves girls. She had two of her own once, but they both died in one year, and her husband was killed in an accident. She did fine sewing and embroidery as long as she could see; then an old friend got her into the Home. I took this picture of her to show you."

She handed the picture to Laura, who passed it on with the comment, "It is a sweet face."

The girls all agreed that it was a sweet face, and Mary Hastings, stirred by Frances' earnest pleading, moved that what money they could spare

should be given to Frances for Mrs. Barlow, but Frances interposed quickly, "She needs the money, but she needs people almost more. She is so happy when Elsie or I go in to see her even just for a minute! I shall be delighted if we take her for our Camp Fire 'service,' but please, girls, *if* we do, give her a little of *yourselves*--not just your money alone," she pleaded.

"How would I know what to say to an old woman?" Lena Barton grumbled. "I shouldn't have an idea how to talk to her."

"You wouldn't need to have--she has ideas of her own a-plenty. Girls, if you'll only once go and see her, you won't need to be coaxed to go again, I'm sure," Frances urged.

"I'm in favour of having Frances' old lady for our 'Camp Fire baby,'" laughed Louise Johnson. "I second Mary's motion."

But Lena Barton's high-pitched voice cut in, "Before we vote on that I'd like to say a word. I've no doubt that Mrs. Barlow is an angel minus the wings, but before we decide to adopt her I'd like to see some of the other old ladies. I've wanted for a long time to get into one of those Homes with a big H. How about it, Frances--would they let me in or are working girls ruled out?"

"O no, any one can go there," Frances replied, but her face and her voice betrayed her disappointment. When Louise spoke, Frances had thought her cause was won.

"All right--I'll go then to-morrow, and maybe I'll find some old lady I'll like better than your white-haired angel," Lena flung out, her red-brown eyes gleaming with sly malice and mischief.

Quite unconsciously, and certainly without intention, the three High School girls held themselves a little apart from Lena and her "crowd,"

and Lena was quite sharp enough to detect and resent this. She chuckled as she watched Frances' clouded face.

"O never mind, Frances," Elsie Harding whispered under cover of a brisk discussion on old ladies, that Lena's words had started, "Lena's just talking for effect. She won't take the trouble to go to the Home."

XII

NANCY REXTREW

But that was where Elsie was mistaken. Lena did go the very next afternoon, and dragged the reluctant Eva with her. The girls, proposing to join the Sunday promenade on the Avenue later, were in their Sunday best when they presented themselves at the big, old-fashioned frame house on Capitol Hill.

"Who you goin' to ask for?" Eva questioned as Lena, lifting the old brass knocker, dropped it sharply.

"The Barlow angel, I s'pose. We don't know the name of anybody else here," Lena returned with a grin.

The maid who answered their summons told them to go right upstairs. They would find Mrs. Barlow in Room 10 on the second floor. So they went up, Lena's eyes, as always, keen and alert, Eva scowling, and wishing herself "out of it."

"Here's No. 6--it must be that second door beyond," Lena said in a low tone; but low as it was, somebody heard, for the next door--No. 8--flew open instantly, and a woman stepped briskly out and faced the girls.

"Come right in--come right in," she said with an imperative gesture.

"My! But I'm glad to see ye!"

So compelling was her action that, with a laugh, Lena yielded and Eva followed her as a matter of course.

The woman closed the door quickly, and pulled forward three chairs, planting herself in the third.

"My land, but it's good to see ye sittin' there," she began. "What's yer names? Mine's Nancy Rextrew."

Lena gave their names, and the woman repeated them lingeringly, as if the syllables were sweet on her tongue. Then she tipped her head, pursed her lips, and gave a little cackling laugh.

"I s'pose ye was bound fer her room--Mis' Barlow's, eh?" she questioned.

"Yes," Lena admitted, "but----"

"I don't care nothin' about it if you was!" Nancy Rextrew broke in hastily, her little black eyes snapping and her wrinkled face all alive with eager excitement. "I don't care a mite if you was. Mis' Barlow has somebody a-comin' to see her nigh about every day, an' I've stood it jest as long as I can. Yesterday when the Chapin girl an' the Harding girl stayed along of her half the afternoon I made up my mind that the next girl that came through this corridor was a-comin' in here--be she who she might. I was right sure some girl or other'd come on a pretty Sunday like this, to read the Bible or suthin' to her, an' I says to myself, 'I'll kidnap the next one--I don't care if it's the daughter of the president in the White House.' An' I've done it, an' I'm *glad*!" she added triumphantly, her eyes meeting Lena's with a flash that drew an answering flash from the girl's.

"Well, now that you've kidnapped us, what next?" Lena demanded with a laugh.

"I do' know an' I don't care what next," the woman flung out with a gleeful reckless gesture. "Of course I can't keep ye if ye *want* to go in there," with a nod towards No. 10, "but you don't somehow look like the pious sort. Be ye?"

Lena shook her head. "I guess I'm your sort," she said. She had never before met an old woman at all like this one, and her heart went out to her. In spite of wrinkles and gray hairs, the spirit of youth nodded to her from Nancy Rextrew's little black eyes, and something in Lena answered as if in spite of herself.

Nancy hitched her chair closer, and with her elbows on her knees, rested her shrivelled chin on her old hands, wrinkled and swollen at the joints. "Now tell me," she commanded, "all about yourself. You ain't no High School girl, I'm thinkin'."

"You're right--I never got above the seventh grade--I had to go to work when I was thirteen. Eva and I both work in Wood and Lanson's."

"What d'ye do there?" Nancy snapped out the question, fairly hugging herself in her delight.

"I'm a wrapper in the hosiery department. Eva's in the hardware."

"I know--I know," Nancy breathed fast as one who must accomplish much in little time, "I've been all over that store. My! But I'd like to see ye both there--'specially *you*!" Her crooked finger pointed at Lena. "I bet you're a good one. You could make a cow buy stockings if you took a notion to."

Lena broke into a shout of laughter at the vision of a cow coming in to be fitted with stockings. "I'm afraid," she gurgled, "that we'd have to make 'em to order--for a cow!" and all three joined in the laughter.

But Nancy could not spare time for much merriment. She poured out eager questions and listened to the answers of the girls with an interest that drew forth ever more details. At last, with a furtive sidelong glance at the clock, she said, "I s'pose now if I should go there to the store you'd be too busy to speak to me--or mebbe you wouldn't want to be seen talkin' to an old thing like me, an' I wouldn't blame ye, neither."

"Stuff!" retorted Lena promptly. "You come to my place next time you're down town and I'll show you. We wouldn't be shoddy enough to turn down a friend, would we, Eva?"

"I guess no," Eva agreed, but without enthusiasm.

"A friend!" As Nancy repeated the word a curious quiver swept over her old lined face. "You don't have to call me a friend," she said. "Old women like me don't expect to be called *friend*--didn't ye know that?"

"I said friend, and I meant what I said," repeated Lena stoutly, and the old woman swallowed once or twice before she spoke again.

"You've told me about your work, now tell me the rest of it--the fun part," she begged.

"O that!" said Lena. "The fun is moving pictures and roller skating and dances and the Avenue parade--with the boys along sometimes."

"I bet ye there's boys along where you be!" Nancy flashed an admiring glance at the girl. "I always did admire bright hair like yours, an' a pinch o' freckles is more takin' than a dimple--if you ask me."

Had Nancy been the shrewdest of mortals she could have said nothing that would have pleased Lena more. She had been called "Carrots" and "Redhead" all her life, and from the bottom of her soul she loathed her fiery locks and her freckles, though never yet had she acknowledged this to any living creature--and here was one who *liked* freckles and red hair! Lena could have hugged the little old woman beaming at her with such honest admiration. A wave of hot colour swept up to her forehead. But Nancy's thoughts had taken another turn.

"Movin' pictures. That's the new kind of show, ain't it? I've heard about 'em, but I've never seen any."

"You can go for a nickel," said Eva.

"A nickel?" echoed Nancy, flashing a swift glance at her. "But nickels don't grow on gooseberry bushes, an' if they did, there ain't any gooseberry bushes around here," she retorted.

"Say----" Lena was leaning forward, her eyes full of interest, "we'll take you to see the movies any time you'll go, won't we, Eva?"

"Er--yes, I guess so," Eva conceded reluctantly; but Nancy paid no attention now to Eva. Her eyes, widened with incredulous joy, were fixed on Lena's vivid face.

"Do you mean it? You ain't foolin'?" she faltered.

"Fooling? Well, I guess you don't know me. When I invite a friend anywhere I mean it. When can you go?"

"When? Now--*this minute!*" Nancy cried, starting eagerly to her feet. Then recollecting herself, she sat down again with a shamefaced little laugh. "For the land's sake, if I wasn't forgettin' all about it's bein' Sunday!" she cried under her breath.

"I guess you wouldn't want to go Sunday," Lena said. "But how about to-morrow evening?"

Old Nancy drew a long breath. "I s'pose mebbe I *can* live through the time till then," she returned. Then with a quick, questioning glance--"But s'posing some of your friends should be there? I guess mebbe--you wouldn't care for 'em to see you with an old woman like me in such a place."

"Don't you fret yourself about that," Lena replied. "You just meet us at the corner of Tenth and the Avenue. I'll be there at half-past seven, if I can. Anyhow, you wait there till I come."

When the girls went away Nancy Rextrew walked with them down to the front door and stood there watching as long as she could see them, her sharp old face full of pride and joy and hope that had long been strangers there.

"O my Lord!" she said under her breath as she went back to her room--and again "O my Lord!"

"That old woman's going to have the time of her life to-morrow night," Lena said, as the two girls walked towards the Avenue.

"I don't suppose she's got a decent thing to wear," Eva grumbled.

Lena turned on her like a flash. "I don't care if she's got nothing but a *nightgown* to wear, she shall have a good time for once if I can make her!" she stormed. "Talk about your Mrs. Barlow!" And Eva subsided into cowed silence.

At quarter of eight the next evening, the two girls saw Nancy Rextrew standing on the corner of Tenth Street and the Avenue, peering anxiously first one way and then the other.

"Oh!" groaned Eva. "Lena Barton, look at the shawl she's got on. I bet it's a hundred years old--and that bonnet!"

"If it's a hundred years old it's an antique and worth good money!" retorted Lena. "Hurry up!"

But Eva hung back. "I'd be ashamed forever if any of the boys should see me with her," she half whimpered.

Lena stopped short and stamped her foot, heedless of interested passers-by. "Then go back!" she cried. "And you needn't hang around me any more. Go *back*, I say!" Without another glance at Eva she hurried on, and Eva sulkily followed.

Rapturous relief swept the anxiety from old Nancy's little triangle of a face as she caught sight of the two girls.

"'Fraid you've been waitin' an age," Lena greeted her breezily. "I couldn't get off as early as I meant to. Come on now--we won't lose any more

time," and slipping her arm under Nancy's, she swept her, breathless and beaming, towards the brilliantly-lighted show-place.

"Two," she slapped a dime down before the ticket-taker, quite ignoring Eva, who silently laid a nickel beside the dime.

The place was one of the best of its kind, well ventilated and spaced and, though the lights were turned down, it was by no means dark within. Lena guided the old woman into a seat and sat down beside her, and Eva, after a quick searching glance that revealed none of her acquaintances present, took the next seat.

For the hour that followed Nancy Rextrew was in Fairyland. With breathless interest, her eyes glued to the pictures, her mouth half open, she followed the quick-moving figures through scenes pathetic or ludicrous with an absorbed attention that would not miss the smallest detail. When that popular idol--the Imp--was performing her antics, the old woman's quick cackling laugh made Eva drop her head that her big hat might hide her face. When the "Drunkard's Family" were passing through their harrowing experiences, tears rolled unheeded down old Nancy's wrinkled cheeks as she sat with her knobby fingers tight clasped.

When, at last, Lena whispered in her ear, "I guess we'll go now," Nancy exclaimed,

"Oh! Is it over? I thought it had just begun. But it was beautiful--beautiful! I'll never----"

A loud sharp explosion cut through her sentence and instantly the whole place was in an uproar. Suffocating fumes filled the room with smoke as the lights went out. Then somebody screamed, "Fire! *Fire!*" and pandemonium reigned. Women shrieked, children wailed, and men and boys fought savagely to get to the doors. Lena was swept on by the first mad rush of the crowd, crazy with fear, but catching at a seat, she tried to slip into it and climb back to Nancy and Eva. Before she could reach

them, she saw Eva thrown down in the aisle by a big woman frantic with terror, who tried to walk over her prostrate body, but a pair of bony hands grabbed the woman's hair and yanked her back, holding her, it seemed, by sheer force of will, for the few precious seconds that gave Lena a chance to pull Eva up and out of the aisle.

"You fools!" The old woman's voice, shrill and cracked, but steady and unafraid, cut through the babel of shrieks and cries, "You fools, there ain't no fire! If you'll stop yellin' an' pushin' and go quiet you'll all get out in a minute. It's jest a step to the doors."

She was only a little old woman--a figure of fun, if they could have seen her clearly, with her old bonnet tilted rakishly over one ear and her shawl trailing behind her--but through the smoke, in that tumult of fear and dread, the dauntless spirit of her loomed large, and dominated the lesser souls craven with terror.

A draught of air thinned the smoke for a moment, and as those in front rushed out, the pressure in the main aisle lessened. Climbing over the back of a seat, Lena caught the old woman's arm.

"Come," she shouted in her ear, "we can get through to the side aisle now--that's almost clear. Come, Eva, buck up--buck up, I say, or we'll never get out of this!" for Eva, terrified, bruised, and half fainting, was now hanging limp and nerveless to Lena's arm.

"Don't you worry 'bout me. Go ahead an' I'll follow," Nancy Rextrew said, and grabbing Eva's other arm, the two half pushed and half carried her between them. Once outside, her blind terror suddenly left her, and she declared herself all right.

"Well, then, let's get out of this," and Lena's sharp elbows forced a passage through the crowd that was increasing every minute, as the rumour of fire spread. She turned to old Nancy. "We'll get you on a car--My goodness, Eva, catch hold of her *quick*! We must get her into the

drug store there on the corner," she ended as she saw the old woman's face.

They got her into the drug store somehow, and then for the first time in her life Nancy Rextrew fainted; and great was her mortification when she came to herself and realised what had happened.

"My soul and body!" she muttered. "I always did despise women that didn't know no better than to faint, an' now I'm one of 'em. Gi' me my Injy shawl an' let me get away. Yes, I be well enough to go home, too!" She struggled to her feet, and snatching her bonnet from Eva, crammed it on her head anyhow, fumbling with the strings while she swayed dizzily.

"Here, let me tie them," Eva said gently. "You sit down so I can reach." She tied the strings very slowly, pulled the old bonnet straight and drew the India shawl over the thin shoulders, taking as much time as she could, to give the old woman a chance to pull herself together.

"I'll take her home," Lena said.

"No, you won't--that's my job!" Eva spoke with unusual decision, and Lena promptly yielded.

"Well--I guess you're right. I guess if it hadn't been for her----"

"Yes," said Eva, and her look made further words unnecessary.

The three walked out to the car a few minutes later. The fire in the picture theatre had been quickly put out, and already the crowd in the street was melting away. Nancy looked up and down the wide avenue brilliant with its many electric lights; then as she saw the car coming she turned to Lena, her pale face crinkling into sudden laughter.

"I don't care--it was worth it!" she declared. "I've lived more to-night than I have in twenty years before. I loved every minute of it--the pictures an' the fire an' everything. But see here--" she leaned down and

whispered in the girl's ear,--"don't you let any feller put his arm round you like the man did round that girl that set in front of us--don't you do it!"

"I guess *not*!" retorted the girl sharply. "I ain't that kind."

"That's right, that's right! An'--an' do come an' see me again some time--do, dearie!" the old woman added over her shoulder as the conductor pulled her up the high step of the car.

Eva followed her. "I'm going to see she gets home all right," she said, and Lena waved her hand as the car passed on.

"An' to think her sharp old eyes saw that!" Lena thought with a chuckle as she turned away. "An' me all the time thinkin' she didn't see anything but the pictures. Well, you never can tell. But she's a duck, an' it's her gets my nickels--angel or no angel. And to think how she kidnapped us--the old dear," and Lena went on laughing to herself.

At the next Camp Fire meeting, Lena, with a mischievous spark in her eyes, called out to Frances Chapin, "Say, Frances, Eva and I took one of your old ladies to the picture show the other night."

Frances looked distinctly disapproving. "I think you might have made a better use of your money," she returned.

"I don't, then!" retorted Lena, and thereupon she told the story of Nancy's Sunday kidnapping, and of what had happened at the picture show. Her graphic wording held the girls breathless with interest.

"Well!" commented Louise Johnson, "I'd like to see that old lady of yours, Lena."

"She's worth seeing." This from Eva.

A week later Louise announced that she had seen Lena's old lady. "Saw her at the Home yesterday. I like her. She sure is a peach."

"Isn't she just?" Lena responded, her face lighting up. "And did you see Frances' angel-all-but-the-wings old lady too?"

"Yes, and she's a peach also, but a different variety," Louise answered with a laugh. "I gave your Miss Rextrew some mint gum and she popped it into her mouth as handily as if she'd chewed gum all her life."

Lena nodded. "She wanted to try it. She wants to try everything that is going. She's a live wire, that's what she is--good old Nancy!"

"We went the rounds--Annie Pearson and I," Louise continued. "Saw all the old ladies except one that doesn't want any visitors. Most of 'em do, though; and say, girlies--" Louise's sweeping glance included all in the room--"I reckon it won't hurt any of us to run up there once a month or so when it means such a lot to those old shut-ins to have us."

There was a swift exchange of amazed glances at this, *from Louise Johnson*, and then a murmur of assent from several voices, before Mary Hastings in her business-like way suggested, "Why not each of us set a date for going? Then we won't forget--or maybe all go on the same day."

"All right, Molly--you make out the list an' we'll all sign it," Lena said, "and, say--make it a nickel fine for any girl that forgets her date or fails to keep it. Does that go, girls?"

"Unless for some good and sufficient reason that she will give at our next meeting," Laura amended.

Then began a new era for the old ladies at the Home. Always on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and often on other evenings, light footsteps and young voices were heard in the corridors and rooms of the old mansion. Not only gentle Mrs. Barlow and eager old Nancy Rextrew, but all the women who had drifted into this backwater of life found their dull days wonderfully brightened by contact with these young lives. Nancy Rextrew looked years younger than on that Sunday when she had turned

kidnapper. Naturally she was still the prime favourite with Lena and Eva, and gloried in that fact. But there were girls "enough to go around" in more senses than one, and most of them were faithful to their agreement, and seldom allowed anything to keep them from the Home on the date assigned to them.

XIII

A CAMP FIRE CHRISTMAS

For over a year Olga had been working in the evening classes of the Arts and Crafts school, and she was now doing excellent work in silver. Her designs were so bold and original and her execution so good, that she received from patrons of the school many orders for Christmas gifts--so many that she gave up her other work in order to devote all her time to this. She had now two rooms, a small bedroom and a larger room which served as kitchen, living-room, and workroom. None of the girls had ever been invited to these rooms, nor even Miss Laura. Elizabeth, Olga would have welcomed there; but it was quite useless to ask her before Sadie joined the Camp Fire. Then Olga saw her opportunity, but it was an opportunity hampered by a very unpleasant condition, and the condition was Sadie. Could she admit Sadie even for the sake of having Elizabeth? Olga pondered long over that while she was teaching the girl to work with the beads and the raffia. Sadie was an apt pupil. Those bony little fingers of hers were deft and quick. Within a month she had made her Camp Fire dress and her headband, and was eagerly at work over the requirements for a Fire Maker. But, as Mary Hastings said to Rose Anderson one day,

"She's sharp as nails--that Sadie! I believe she can learn anything she sets her mind on; but she's such a selfish little pig! I can't endure her."

"I wish I had her memory," Rose answered. "How she did reel off the Fire Ode and the Fire Maker's desire the other night! I haven't learned that Ode yet so that I can say it without stumbling."

"O, Sadie can reel it off without a mistake, but she's as blind to the meaning of it as this sidewalk. There's no *heart* to Sadie Page. She can thank Elizabeth that we ever voted her in."

"Elizabeth--and Olga," Rose amended.

"O, Olga--well, that was for Elizabeth too. Olga did it just for her--got Sadie in, I mean."

"She's--different--lately, don't you think, Molly?"

"Who--Olga?"

Rose nodded.

"Yes, she's getting more human. She's opened her heart to Elizabeth and she can't quite shut it against the rest of us--not quite--though she opens it only the tiniest crack."

"But I think it's lovely the way she is to Sadie. You know she must hate that kind of a girl as much as we do, or more--and yet she endures and helps her in every way just to give Elizabeth her chance. Miss Laura says Olga is doing lovely silver work. I'd like to see some of it, but I don't dare ask her to let me."

"You'd better not," laughed Mary, "unless you are ready to be snubbed. Nobody but Elizabeth will ever be privileged to that extent."

"And Sadie."

"Well, possibly, but not if Olga can help it."

Yet it was Sadie and not Elizabeth who was the first of the Camp Fire Girls to be admitted to Olga's rooms. Sadie was wild to take up the silver work. She wanted to make herself a complete set--bracelet, ring, pin, and hatpin, after a design she had seen. Again and again she brought the matter up, for, once she got an idea in her head, she clung to it with the tenacity of a limpet to a rock.

"I think you *might* teach me!" she cried out impatiently one day, meeting Olga in the street. "You said you'd teach me all you know--you did, Olga Priest--and now you won't."

"I've taught you basket work and beadwork and embroidery, and the knots, and the Red-Cross things, and I'm helping you to win your honours," Olga reminded her.

"O, I know--but I want to make the silver set just awfully. I can do it--I know I can--and you promised, Olga Priest, you *promised!*" Sadie repeated, half crying in her eager impatience.

"Well," Olga said with a reluctance she did not try to conceal, "if you hold me to that promise----"

"I do then!" Sadie declared, her black eyes watching Olga's lips as if she would snatch the words from them before they were spoken.

"Then I suppose I must," Olga went on slowly. "But listen, Sadie. You don't seem to realise what you are asking of me. I've been nearly two years learning this work, and I paid for my lessons--a good big price, too--yet you expect me to teach you for nothing."

"Well, you know I've no money to pay for lessons," Sadie retorted sulkily.

"I know--but you see you don't *have* to learn the silver work. There are plenty of other things for you to learn in handcraft."

Sadie's narrow sharp face flushed and she stamped her foot angrily. "But I don't *want* the other things, and I *do* want this. I--I've just got to have that silver set, Olga Priest."

Olga set her lips firmly. She must draw the line somewhere, for there seemed no limit to Sadie's demands. Then a thought occurred to her and she said slowly, "I don't feel, Sadie, that you have any right to ask this of me. It is different from the other things. The silver work is my trade--the way I earn my living. But I will teach you to make your set on one condition."

"It's something about Elizabeth, I know," Sadie flung out with an angry flirt.

"No, not this time. Sadie, have you ever given any one a Christmas present?"

"No, of course not. I don't have any money to buy 'em."

"Well, this is my condition. I'll teach you to make the silver set for yourself if you will first make something for----"

"Elizabeth!" broke in Sadie. "I said so."

"No, not for Elizabeth--for your mother."

Sadie stood staring, her mouth open, her eyes full of amazement.

"What you want me to do that for?" she demanded.

"No matter why. Will you do it?"

Sadie wriggled her shoulders and scowled. "I want to make my set first--then I will."

But Olga shook her head. "No," she replied firmly, "for your mother first, or else I'll not teach you at all."

"But I'll have to wait so long then for mine." Sadie was half crying now.

"That's my offer--you can take it or leave it," Olga said. "I must go on now. Think it over and tell me Saturday what you decide."

"O--if I must, I must, I s'pose," Sadie yielded ungraciously. "How long will it take me to make mother's?"

"Depends on how quickly you learn."

"O, I'll learn quick enough!" Sadie tossed her head as one conscious of her powers. "When can I begin?"

"Monday. Can you come right after school?"

"Uh, huh," and with a brief good-bye Sadie was gone.

Olga had no easy task with her over the making of her mother's gift. It was to be a brass stamp box, and her only thought was to get it out of the way so that she could begin on her own jewelry; but Olga was firm.

"If you don't make a good job of this your lessons will end right here," she declared, and Sadie had learned that when Olga spoke in that tone, she must be obeyed. She gloomed and pouted, but seeing no other way to get what she wanted she set to work in earnest. And as the work grew under her hands, her interest in it grew. When, finally, the box was done, it was really a creditable bit of work for the first attempt of a girl barely fourteen, and Sadie was inordinately proud of it.

It was December now and Christmas was the absorbing interest of the Camp Fire Girls. They were to have a tree in the Camp Fire room, but Laura told them to make their gifts very simple and inexpensive.

"We must not spoil the Great Day by giving what we cannot afford," she said. "The loving thought is the heart of Christmas giving--not the money value. I'll get our tree, but you can help me string popcorn and cranberries to trim it, and put up the greenery."

"Me too--O Miss Laura, can't I help too?" Jim cried anxiously.

"Why, of course. We couldn't get along without you, Jim," half a dozen voices assured him before Laura could answer.

"I wish our old ladies could come to our tree," Elsie Harding said to Alice Reynolds.

"They couldn't. Most of them can't go out evenings, you know. But we might put gifts for them on the tree they have at the Home."

"Or have them hang up stockings," suggested Louise Johnson. "Just imagine forty long black stockings strung around those parlour walls. Wouldn't it be a sight?" she giggled.

"Nancy Rextrew wouldn't have her stocking hung on any parlour wall. It would be in her own room or nowhere," put in Lena.

"Why not get some of those red Christmas stockings from the five cent store, and fill one for each old lady?" Mary Hastings proposed. "We could go late, after they'd all gone to their rooms, and hang the stockings, full, on their doorknobs."

"Or get the superintendent to hang them early in the morning," was Laura's suggestion.

"Yes, we can get the stockings and the 'fillings,'" Mary Hastings went on, "and have all sent to the superintendent's room. Then we can go there and fill them. It won't take long if we all go."

"And not have any tree for them?" Myra asked in a disappointed tone.

"O, they always have a tree with candles and trimmings--the Board ladies furnish that," Frances explained.

The girls lingered late that night talking over Christmas plans. The air was heavy with secrets, there were whispered conferences in corners, and somebody was always drawing Laura aside to ask advice or help. Only Elizabeth had no part in these mysterious whisperings. She had blossomed into happy friendliness with all the girls now that she came regularly to the meetings, but the old sad silence crept over her again in these December days. It was Olga who guessed her trouble and went with it to Sadie, drawing her away from a group of girls who were busy over crochet work.

"Look at Elizabeth," she began.

Sadie stared at her sister sitting apart from the others, listlessly gazing into the fire. "Well, what of her? What's eating her?" Sadie demanded in her most aggravating manner.

Olga frowned. Sadie's slang was a trial to her.

"Elizabeth says she is not coming to the Christmas tree here."

"Well, she don't have to, if she don't want to," Sadie retorted, but she cast an uneasy glance at the silent figure by the fire.

"She does want to, Sadie Page--you know she does."

"Well, then--what's the answer?" demanded Sadie.

"Would *you* come if you couldn't give a single thing to any one?" Olga asked quietly.

"Why don't she make things then--same's I do?" Sadie's tone was sullen now.

"You know why. Your mother gives you a little money----"

"Mighty little," Sadie interrupted. "I'm going to work when I'm sixteen. Then I'll have my own money to spend."

"And Elizabeth is nearly eighteen and can't work for herself because she spends all her time working for the rest of you at home," said Olga.

A startled look flashed into the sharp black eyes. Sadie had actually never before thought of that.

Olga went on, "I guess you'd miss Elizabeth at home if she should go away to work, but she ought to do it as soon as she is eighteen. And if she should, you'd have to do some of the kitchen work, wouldn't you? And maybe then you wouldn't have a chance to go away and earn money for yourself."

"Is she going to do that--go off to work when she's eighteen?" Sadie demanded, plainly disturbed at the suggestion.

"Everybody would say she had a right to. Most girls would have gone long ago--you know it, Sadie. You'd better make things easier for her at home if you want to keep her there."

"How?" Sadie's voice was despondent now. "Father gets so little pay--we're pinched all the time."

"Yet *you* have good clothes and money for your silver work----"

"Well, I have to just tease it out of mother. You don't know how I have to tease."

Olga could imagine. "Well," she said, "the girls all guess how it is about Elizabeth, and, if you come to the tree and she doesn't, I shan't envy you, that's all. You are smart enough to think up some way to help Elizabeth out."

"I d'know how!" grumbled Sadie. "I think you're real mean, Olga Priest--always saying things to spoil my fun, so there!" and she whirled around and went back to the other girls.

"All the same," said Olga to herself, "I've set her to thinking."

The next afternoon Sadie burst tumultuously into Olga's room crying out, "I've thought what Elizabeth can do! She can make some cakes--she made some for us last Christmas--awful nice ones, with nuts an' citron an' raisins in 'em. She can put white icing over 'em an' little blobs of red sugar for holly berries, you know, with citron leaves. I thought that up myself, about the icing. Won't they be dandy?"

"Fine! Good for you, Sadie!"

Sadie accepted the approval as her due, and went on breathlessly, "I thought it all out in school to-day. An' say, Olga--I can make baskets of

green and white crepe paper to hold three or four of the cakes, an' stick a bit of holly in each basket. Then they can be from me an' 'Lizabeth both--how's that?"

"Couldn't be better," Olga declared.

"Uh huh, you see little Sadie has a head on her all right!" Sadie exulted. But Olga could overlook her conceit since, for once, she had taken thought for Elizabeth too.

Laura wondered if, amid all the bustle and excitement of Christmas planning and doing, Jim would forget about the Christmas for the Children's Hospital, but he did not forget; and when she told him that she was depending upon him to tell her what the boys there would like, Jim had no trouble at all in deciding. So one Saturday Miss Laura took him down town early before the stores were crowded and they had a delightful time selecting books and toys.

"My-ee!" Jim cried, as they were speeding up Connecticut Avenue, the car piled with packages, "won't this be a splendid Christmas! Ours first at home, and the hospital Christmas and the Camp Fire one and the old ladies' one--it'll be four Christmases all in one year, won't it, Miss Laura?" he exulted.

"Besides a tree and a gift for each one in your outdoor school," Laura added.

Jim stared at her wide-eyed. "O, who's going to give them?" he cried. "You?"

"You and I and the judge, Jim. That is our thank-offering for all that the school is doing for you--and for Jo."

Jim moved close and hid his face for a long moment on Laura's shoulder. She knew that he was afraid he might cry, but this time they would have

been tears of pure joy. He explained presently, when he was sure that his eyes were all right.

"That will be the best Christmas of all, 'cause some of the out-doorers wouldn't have a teeny bit of Christmas at home. Jo wouldn't. He says they never hang up stockings or anything like that at his house. He said he didn't care, but I know he did."

That evening Miss Laura asked, "How would you like to put something on our tree for Jo?"

"The Camp Fire tree--and have him come?" Jim cried eagerly.

"Of course."

It took three somersaults to get that out of Jim's system. When he came up, flushed and joyful, Laura said, "I'm going to tell you a Christmas secret, Jim. I am going to have each Camp Fire Girl invite her mother, or any one else she likes, to come to our tree. We can't have presents for them all, of course, but there will be ice cream and cake enough for everybody."

"O, Miss *Laura*!" Jim cried. "It's going to be the best Christmas that ever was in this world!"

And Jim was not the only one who thought so before the Great Day was over. The tree at the outdoor school, the day before, was a splendid surprise to every one there except the teacher and Jim, and all the little "out-doorers," as Jim called them, went home with their hands full. At the hospital the celebration was very quiet, but in spite of pain and weariness, the boys in the first ward enjoyed their gifts as much as Jim had hoped they would. And the Christmas stocking, full and running over, that each old lady at the Home found hanging to her doorknob, made those old children as happy as the young ones.

Jim's stocking could not hold half his treasures, and words failed him utterly before he had opened the last package. But the Camp Fire celebration was the great success. The tree was a blaze of light and colour, and the gifts which the girls had made for each other were many and varied. Some of the beadwork and basket work was really beautiful, and there were pretty bits of crochet and some knitted slippers--all the work of the girls themselves. Miss Laura had begged them to give her no gift, and hers to each of them was only a little water-colour sketch with "Love is the joy of service," beautifully lettered, beneath it.

Sadie's baskets of crepe paper were really very pretty, and these filled with Elizabeth's holly cakes were one of the "successes" of the evening. They were praised so highly that Elizabeth was quite, quite happy and Sadie "almost too proud to live," as she confided to Olga in an excited whisper.

But the best of all was the pleasure of the guests of the evening--Jack Harding and Jo Barton and David Chapin, who all came as Jim's guests--Louise Johnson's brother, a big awkward boy of sixteen--Eva Bicknell's mother, with her bent shoulders and rough hands, and other mothers more or less like her. The four boys helped when the cake and ice cream were served, and Jim whispered to Jo that he could have just as many helpings as he wanted--Miss Laura said so--and Jo wanted several. It was by no means a quiet occasion--there was plenty of noise and laughter, and fun, and Laura was in the heart of it all. They closed the evening with ten minutes of Christmas carols in which everybody joined, and then while the girls were getting on their wraps, the mothers crowded about Laura, and the things some of them said filled her heart with a great joy, for they told her how much the Camp Fire was doing for their girls--making them kinder and more helpful at home, keeping them off the streets, teaching them so many useful and pretty sorts of work.

"My girl is so much happier, and more contented than she used to be," one said.

"Mine, too," another added. "I can't be glad enough for the Camp Fire. Johnny's a Scout an' that's a mighty good thing, too, but for girls there's nothing like the Camp Fire."

"Eva used to hate housework, but now she does it thinkin' about the beads she's getting, and she don't hardly ever fret over it," Mrs. Bicknell confided.

"These things you are saying are the very best Christmas gift I could possibly have," Laura told them, with shining eyes.

And the girls themselves, as they bade her good-night said words that added yet more to the full cup of her Christmas joy.

"O, it pays, father--this work with my girls," she said, when all had gone, and they two sat together before the fire. "It has been such a beautiful, beautiful Christmas!"

XIV

LIZETTE

The last night of December brought a heavy storm of sleety rain, with a bitter north wind. Laura, reading beside the fire, heard the doorbell ring, and presently Olga Priest appeared. The biting wind had whipped a fresh colour into her cheeks, and her eyes were clear and shining under her heavy brows.

"You aren't afraid of bad weather, Olga," Laura said as she greeted the girl.

"All weather is the same to me," Olga returned indifferently, but as she sat down Laura cried out,

"Why, child, your feet are soaking wet! Surely you did not come without rubbers in such a storm!"

"I forgot them. It's no matter," Olga said, drawing her wet feet under her skirts.

"I'll be back in a moment," Laura replied, and left the room, returning with dry stockings and slippers.

"Take off those wet things and heat your feet thoroughly--then put these on," she ordered in a tone that admitted of no refusal.

With a frown, Olga obeyed. "But it's nonsense--I never mind wet feet," she grumbled.

"You ought to mind them. Your health is a gift. You have no right to throw it away--no *right*, Olga. It is yours--only to *use*--like everything else you have."

Olga paused, one slipper in her hand, pondering that.

"Don't you see, Olga," Laura urged gently, "we are only stewards. Everything we have--health, time, money, intellect--all are ours only to use the little while we are in this world, and not to use for ourselves alone."

"It makes life harder if you believe that," Olga flung back defiantly. "I want my things for myself."

"O no, it makes life easier, and O, so big and beautiful!" Laura leaned forward, speaking earnestly. "When we really accept this idea of service, then 'self is forgotten.' We give as freely as we have received." Olga shook her head with a gesture that put all that aside.

"You said Saturday that you wanted my help----" she began.

"Yes, I do want your help. I'll tell you how presently. Sadie Page is doing very well in the craft work, isn't she?"

"Yes. She can copy anything--designing is her weak point--but she is doing very well."

"She is improving in other ways."

"There's room for improvement still," Olga retorted in her grimmest voice. Then her conscience forced her to add, "But she is more endurable. She treats Elizabeth some better than she did."

"Yes, Elizabeth seems so happy now."

Laura went on thoughtfully, "You are a Fire Maker. Olga, I want you for a Torch Bearer."

Olga stared in blank amazement, then her face darkened. "But I don't want to be a Torch Bearer," she cried. "A Torch Bearer is a leader. I don't want to be a leader."

"But I need your help, and some of the girls need you. You can be a splendid leader, if you will. Have you any right to refuse?"

"I don't see why not."

"If in our Camp Fire there are girls whom you might hold back from what will harm them, or whom you could help to higher and happier living, don't you owe it to them to do this?"

"Why? They do nothing for me. I don't ask them to do anything for me."

"But that is pure selfishness. That attitude is unworthy of you, Olga."

The girl stirred restlessly. "I don't want to be responsible for other girls," she impatiently cried out.

"Have you any choice--you or I? We have promised to keep the law."

"What law?"

"The law of love and service--have you forgotten?" Miss Laura repeated softly, "I purpose to bring my strength, my ambition, my heart's desire, my joy, and my sorrow, to the fire of humankind. The fire that is called the love of man for man--the love of man for God."

Then for many minutes in the room there was silence broken only by the crackling of the fire, and the voices of the storm without. Olga sat motionless, the old sombre shadow brooding in her eyes. At last she stirred impatiently, and spoke.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Have you noticed Lizette Stone lately?" Miss Laura asked.

"No. I never notice her."

"Poor girl, I'm afraid most of you feel that way about her," Laura said, with infinite pity in her voice. "She never looks happy, but lately there is

something in her face that troubles me. She looks as if she had lost hope and courage, and were simply drifting. I've tried to win her confidence, but she will not talk with me about herself. I thought--at least, I hoped--that you might be able to find out what is the trouble."

"Why I, rather than any other girl?"

"I don't know why I feel so sure that you might succeed, but I do feel so, Olga. She may be in great trouble. If you could find out what it is, I might be able to help her. Will you try, Olga?"

The girl shook her head. "I can't promise, Miss Laura. I'll think about it," was all she would concede.

"She works in Silverstein's," Laura added, "and I think she has no relatives in the city."

The talk drifted then to other matters, and when Olga glanced at the clock, Miss Laura touched a bell, and in a few minutes a maid brought up a cup of hot clam bouillon. "You must take it, Olga, before you go out again in this storm," Laura said, and reluctantly the girl obeyed.

When she went away, Laura went to the door with her. The car stood there, and before she fairly realised that it was waiting for her Olga was inside, and the chauffeur was tucking the fur rug around her. As, leaning back against the cushions, shielded from wet and cold, she was borne swiftly through the storm, something hard and cold and bitter in the girl's heart was suddenly swept away in a strong tide of feeling quite new to her, and strangely mingled of sweet and bitter. It was Miss Laura she was thinking of--Miss Laura who had furnished the beautiful Camp Fire room for the girls and made them all so warmly welcome there--who so plainly carried them all in her heart and made their joys and sorrows, their cares and troubles, her own--as she was making Lizette Stone's now. How good she had been to Elizabeth, how patient and gentle with that provoking Sadie, and with careless slangy Lena Barton and Eva! And to

her--Olga thought of the dry stockings and slippers, the hot broth, and now--the car ordered out on such a night just for her. The girl's throat swelled, her eyes burned, and the last vestige of bitterness was washed out of her heart in a rain of hot tears.

"If she can do so much for all of us I *can't* be mean enough to shirk any longer. I'll see Lizette to-morrow," she vowed, as the car stopped at her door. She stood for a moment on the steps looking after it before she went in. It had been only "common humanity" to send the girl home in the car on that stormy night, so Miss Laura would have said. She did not guess what it would mean to Olga and through her to other girls--many others--before all was done.

Silverstein's was a large department store on Seventh Street. Lizette Stone, listlessly putting away goods the next day, stopped in surprise at sight of Olga Priest coming towards her.

"Almost closing time, isn't it?" Olga said, and added, as Lizette nodded silently, "I want to speak to you--I'll wait outside."

In five minutes Lizette joined her. "Do you walk home?" Olga asked.

"Yes, it isn't far--Ninth Street near T."

"We're neighbours then. I live on Eleventh."

"I know. Saw you going in there once," Lizette replied.

There was little talk between them as they walked. Lizette was waiting--Olga wondering what she should say to this girl.

"Well, here's where I hang out." In Lizette's voice there was a reckless and bitter tone.

"O--here!" Olga's quick glance took in the ugly house-front with its soiled "Kensington" curtains--its door ajar showing worn oilcloth in the hall.

"Cheerful place--eh?" Lizette said. "Want to see the inside, or is the outside enough?"

"I want you to come home to supper with me--will you?" Olga said, half against her will.

"Do you mean it?" Lizette's hard blue eyes searched her face. "Take it back in a hurry if you don't, for I'd accept an invitation from--anybody to-night, rather than spend the evening here."

"Of course, I mean it. Please come." Olga laid a compelling hand on the other girl's arm and they went on down the street.

"Now you are to rest while I get supper," Olga said as she threw open her own door. "Here--give me your things." She took Lizette's hat and coat. "Now you lie down in there until I call you."

Without a word Lizette obeyed.

Olga creamed some chipped beef, toasted bread, and made tea, adding a few cakes that she had bought on the way home. When all was ready, she stood a moment, frowning at the table. The cloth was fresh and clean, but the dishes were cheap and ugly. She had never cared before. Now, for this other girl, she wanted some touch of beauty. But Lizette found nothing lacking.

"Everything tastes so good," she said. "You sure do know how to cook, Olga."

"Just a few simple things. I never care much what I eat."

"You'd care if you had to eat at Miss Rankin's table," Lizette declared.

With a question now and then, Olga drew her on to tell of her life at Miss Rankin's, and her work at the store. After a little she talked freely, glad to pour the tale of her troubles into a sympathetic ear.

"I *hate* it all--that boarding-house, where nothing and nobody is really clean, and the store where only the pretty girls or the extra smart ones ever get on. The pretty girls always have chances, but me--I'm homely as sin, and I know it; and I'm not smart, and I know that, too. I shall get my walking ticket the first dull spell, and then----"

"Then, what, Lizette?"

"The Lord knows. It's a hard world for girls, Olga."

"You've no relatives?"

"Only some cousins. They're all as poor as poverty too, and they don't care a pin for me."

"Is there any kind of work you would really like if you could do it?"

"What's the use of talking--I can't do it."

"But tell me," Olga urged.

"You'll think I'm a fool."

"No, I will not," Olga promised.

"It seems ridiculous----" Lizette hesitated, the colour rising in her sallow cheeks, "but I'd just *love* to make beautiful white things--lingerie, you know, like what I sell at the store. It would be next best to having them to wear myself. I don't care so much about the outside things--gowns and hats--but I think it would be just heavenly to have all the underneath things white and lacey, and lovely--don't you think so?"

"I never thought of it. You see I don't care about clothes," Olga returned.

"Can you sew, Lizette?"

Lizette hesitated, then, with a look half shamefaced and half proud, she drew from her bag a bit of linen.

"It was a damaged handkerchief. I got it for five cents, at a sale," she explained. "It will make a jabot."

"And you did this?" Olga asked.

Lizette nodded. "I know it isn't good work, but if I had time I could learn----"

"Yes, you could--if you had the time and a few lessons. Are your eyes strong?"

The other nodded again. "Strong as they are ugly," she flung out.

"Leave this with me for a day or two, will you, Lizette?"

"Uh-huh," Lizette returned indifferently. "Give it to you, if you'll take it."

"Oh no--it's too pretty. Lizette, you hate it so at Miss Rankin's--why don't you rent a room and get your own meals as I do?"

"Couldn't. I'm so dead tired most nights that I'd rather go hungry than get my own supper. Some girls don't seem to mind being on their feet from eight to six, but I can't stand it. Sometimes I get so tired it seems as if I'd rather *die* than drag through another day of it! And besides--I don't much like the other boarders at Rankin's, but they're better than nobody. To go back at night to an empty room and sit there till bedtime with not a soul to speak to--O, I couldn't stand it. I'd get in a blue funk and end it all some night. I'm tempted to, as it is, sometimes." She added, with a miserable laugh that was half a sob, "Nobody'd care," and Olga heard her own voice saying earnestly,

"I'd care, Lizette. You must never, *never* think a thing like that again!"

Lizette searched the other's face with eyes in which sharp suspicion gradually changed into half incredulous joy. "Well," she said slowly, "if one living soul cares even a little bit what happens to me, I'll try to pull through somehow. The Camp Fire's the only thing that has made life

endurable to me this past year, and I haven't enjoyed that so awfully much, for nobody there seems to really care--I just hang on to the edges."

"Miss Laura cares."

"O, in a way, because I belong to her Camp Fire--that's all," returned Lizette moodily.

"No, she cares--really," Olga persisted, but Lizette answered only by an incredulous lift of her thin, sandy brows.

"I must go now," she said, rising, and with her hands on Olga's shoulders she added, "You don't know what this evening here has meant to me. I--was about at the end of my rope."

"I'm glad you came," Olga spoke heartily, "and you are coming again Thursday. Maybe I'll have something then to tell you, but if I don't, anyhow, we'll have supper together and a talk after it."

To that Lizette answered nothing, but the look in her eyes sent a little thrill of happiness through Olga's heart.

Olga carried the bit of linen to Laura the next evening, and told her what she had learned of Lizette's hard life.

"Poor child!" Miss Laura said. "I imagined something like this. We must find other work for her. Perhaps I can get her into Miss Bayly's Art Store. She would not have to be on her feet so much there, and would have a chance to learn embroidery if she really has any aptitude for it. I know Miss Bayly very well, and I think I can arrange it to have Lizette work there for six months. That would be long enough to give her a chance."

"Would she get any pay?" Olga asked.

"Of course--the same she gets now," Laura returned, but Olga was sure that the pay would not come out of Miss Bayly's purse.

Laura went on thoughtfully, "The other matter is not so easily arranged. Even if we get her a better boarding place, she might be just as lonely as at Miss Rankin's. Evidently she does not make friends easily."

"No, she is plain and unattractive and so painfully conscious of it that she thinks nobody can want to be her friend, so she draws into herself and--and pushes everybody away," Olga was speaking her thought aloud--one of her thoughts--the other that had been in her heart since her talk with Lizette, she refused to consider. But it insisted upon being considered when she went away. It was with her in her own room where Lizette's hopeless words seemed to echo and re-echo. Finally, in desperation she faced it.

"I *can't* have her come here!" she cried aloud. "It would mean that I'd never be sure of an hour alone. She'd be forever running in and out and I'd feel I must be forever bracing her up--pumping hope and courage into her. It's too much to ask of me. I'm alone in the world as she is, but I'm not whining. I stand on my own feet and other people can stand on theirs. I can't have that girl here and I won't--and that ends it!" But it didn't end it. Lizette's hopeless eyes, Lizette's reckless voice, would not be banished from her memory, and when Thursday evening the girl herself came, Olga knew that she must yield--there was no other way.

Lizette paused on the threshold. "You can still back out," she said, longing and pride mingling in her eyes. "I can get back to Rankin's in time for my share of liver and prunes."

Olga drew her in and shut the door. "Your days at Miss Rankin's are numbered," she said, "that is if you will come here. There's a little room across the hall you can have if you want it."

Lizette dropped into a chair, the colour slowly ebbing from her sallow cheeks. "Don't fool with me, Olga," she cried, "I'm--not up to it."

"I'm not fooling."

"But--I don't understand." The girl's lips were quivering.

Olga went on, "And your days at Silverstein's are numbered too. I showed your embroidery to Miss Laura, and she has found you a place at Bayly's Art Store. You can go there as soon as you can leave Silverstein's," she ended. To her utter dismay Lizette dropped her head on the table and began to cry. Olga sat looking at her in silence. She did not know what to do. But presently Lizette lifted her blurred and tear-stained face and smiled through her tears.

"You must excuse me this once," she cried. "I'm not tear-y as a general thing, but--but, I hadn't dared to hope--for anything--and it bowled me over. I'll promise not to do so again; but O, Olga Priest, I'll never, *never* forget what you've done, as long as I live!"

"It's not I, it's Miss Laura. I couldn't have got you the place."

"I know, and I'm grateful to Miss Laura, but that isn't half as much as your letting me come here. I--I won't be a bother, truly I won't. But O, it will be so heavenly good to be in reach of somebody who *cares* even a little bit. You shall not be sorry, Olga--I promise you that."

"I'm not sorry. I'm glad," Olga said. "Come now and see the room."

It was a small room--the one across the hall--and rather shabby, with its matting soiled and torn, its cheap iron bedstead and painted washstand and chairs. Lizette however was quite content with it.

"It's lots better than the one I have at Rankin's," she declared.

But the next day Laura came and saw the room, and then sent word to all the girls except Lizette to come on Wednesday evening to the Camp Fire room and bring their thimbles. And when they came she had some soft curtain material to be hemmed, and some cream linen to be hemstitched. Many fingers made light work, and all was finished that evening, and an appointment made with two of the High School girls for the next Monday

afternoon. Then two hours of steady work transformed the bare little room. There was fresh white matting on the floor with a new rag rug before the white enamelled bedstead with its clean new mattress, a chiffonier and washstand of oak, with two chairs, and a tiny round table that could be folded to save room. The soft cream curtains that the girls had hemmed shaded the window, and the linen covers were on the chiffonier and washstand.

"Doesn't it look fresh and pretty!" Alice Reynolds cried, as she looked around, when all was done.

"I'm sure she'll like it," Elsie Harding added.

"Like it?" Olga spoke from the doorway. "You can't begin to know what it will mean to her. You'd have to see her room at Rankin's to understand. But that isn't all. Lizette will believe now that *somebody cares*."

"O!" Elsie's eyes filled with tears. "Did she think that--that nobody cared?"

"She said she was 'most at the end of her rope' the first time she came to see me."

"She shall never again feel that nobody cares," Laura said softly.

"Indeed, no!" echoed Alice, and added, "I'm going to bring down a few books to put on that table."

"I'll make a hanging shelf to hold them. That will be better than having them on the table," Elsie said.

"And I'll bring some growing plants for the window-sill," Laura promised.

"O, I hope she'll just *love* this room," Elsie cried, when reluctantly they turned away.

"She will--you needn't be afraid," Olga assured her.

But Olga was the only one privileged to see Lizette when she had her first glimpse of the room. She stopped short inside the door and looked around her, missing no single detail. Then she turned to Olga a face stirred with emotion too deep for words. When she did speak it was in a whisper. "For *me*? Olga, who did it?"

"Miss Laura, Elsie, and Alice--and we all helped on the curtains and covers."

"I just can't believe it. I--I must be dreaming. Don't let me wake up till I enjoy it a little first," she pleaded. After a moment she added, "And this all came through the Camp Fire, and my place at Miss Bayly's too. Olga Priest, I'm a Camp Fire Girl heart and soul and body from now on. I've been only the shell of one before, but now--now, I've got to pass this on somehow. I must do things for other girls that have no one and nothing--as they've done this for me."

And through Olga's mind floated like a glad refrain, "Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten."

Olga was glad--glad with all her heart--for Lizette, and yet that first evening she sat in her own room dreading to hear the tap on her door which she expected every moment. At nine o'clock, however, it had not come, and then she went across and did the knocking herself.

"Come in, come in," Lizette cried, as she opened her door.

"I've been expecting you over all the evening," Olga said, "and when you didn't come I was afraid you were sick--or something."

Lizette looked at her with a queer little smile. "I know. You sat there thinking that you'd never have any peace now with me so near; but you needn't worry. I'm not going to haunt you. I've got a home corner here all

my own, and I know that you are there just across the hall, and that's enough. It's going to *be* enough."

"But I don't want you to feel that way," Olga protested. "I want you to come."

"You *want* to want me, you mean. O, I'm sharp enough, Olga, if I'm not smart. I know--and I don't mean that you shall ever be sorry that you brought me here. If I get way down in the doleful dumps some night I'll knock at your door--perhaps. Anyhow, you're *there*, and that means a lot to me."

Almost every evening after that Olga heard light footsteps and voices in the hall, and taps on Lizette's door. Elsie and Alice were determined she should no longer feel that "nobody cared," so they were her first callers, but others followed. Lizette welcomed them all with shining eyes, and once she cried earnestly, "I just *love* every one of you girls now! And I wish I could do something for you as lovely as what you have done for me."

"And that's Lizette Stone!" Lena said to Eva after they left. "Who would ever have thought she'd say a thing like that?"

For more than a week Olga, alone in her room, listened to the merry voices across the hall. Then one night, she put aside her work, and went across again.

"I've found out that I'm lonesome," she said as Lizette opened the door. "May I come in?"

"Well, I *guess*!" and Lizette drew her in and motioned to the bed. "You shall have a reserved seat there with Bessie and Myra," she cried, "and we're gladder than glad to have you."

For a moment sheer surprise held the others silent till Olga exclaimed, "Don't let me be a wet blanket. If you do I shall run straight back."

The tongues were loosened then and though Olga said little, the girls felt the difference in her attitude. She lingered a moment after the others left, to say, "Lizette, you mustn't stay away any more. I really want you to come to my room."

Lizette's sharp eyes studied her face before she answered, "Yes, I see you do now, and I'll come. I'll love to."

Back in her own room Olga turned up the gas and stood for some minutes looking about. Clean it was, and in immaculate order, but bare, with no touch of beauty anywhere. The contrast with the simple beauty of Lizette's room made her see her own in a new light. The words of the Wood Gatherer's "Desire" came into her mind--"Seek beauty." She had not done that. "Give service." She had given it, grudgingly at first to Elizabeth, grudgingly all this time to Sadie, grudgingly to Lizette, and not at all to any one else. Only one part of her promise had she kept faithfully--to "Glorify work." She had done that, after a fashion. She drew in her breath sharply. "Lizette is a long way ahead of me. She is trying to be an all-around Camp Fire Girl. If I'm going to keep up with her, I must get busy," she said to herself. "Before I can be Miss Laura's Torch Bearer I've a lot to make up. Here I've been calling Sadie Page a selfish little beast and all the time I've been as bad as she in a different way. Well--we'll see."

She went shopping the next morning. Her purchases did not cost much, but they transformed the bare room. Cheesecloth curtains at the windows, a green crex rug on the dull stained floor, two red geraniums, and on the mantelpiece three brass candlesticks holding red candles. These and a few pretty dishes were all, but she was amazed at the difference they made. At six o'clock she set her door ajar, and when Lizette came, called her in.

"You are to have supper with me to-night," she said.

"But I've had my supper. I----" Lizette began--then stopped short with a little cry, "O, how pretty! Why, your room is lovely now, Olga."

"You see the influence of example," replied Olga. "Yours is so pretty that I couldn't stand the bareness of mine any longer."

"I'm glad." Lizette spoke earnestly. "Isn't it splendid--the way the Camp Fire ideas grow and spread? They are making me over, Olga."

Olga nodded. "Take off your things. I'll have supper ready in two minutes. Did you get yours at the Cafeteria?"

"Yes, I'm getting all my meals there--ten cents apiece."

"Ten cents. I know you don't get enough--for that, Lizette Stone."

Lizette laughed. "It's all I can afford," she said "out of six dollars a week. When I earn more----"

"You can't cook for yourself as I do--you haven't room. Lizette, why can't we co-operate?"

"What do you mean?" breathlessly Lizette questioned.

"I mean, take our meals together and share the expense. It won't cost you more than thirty cents a day, and you'll have enough then."

"But I can't cook--I don't know how," Lizette objected.

"I'll teach you. And you've got to learn before you can be a Fire Maker, you know."

"Yes--I know," said Lizette slowly, "and I'd like it, but you--Olga, you'd get sick of it. You're used to being alone. You wouldn't want any one around every day--you know you wouldn't."

"It would be better for me than eating alone, and better for you than the Cafeteria. Come, Lizette, say 'yes.'"

"Yes, then," Lizette answered. "At least--I'll try it for a month, if you'll promise to tell me frankly at the end of the month if you'd rather not keep on."

"Agreed," said Olga.

"My! But it will be good to have a change from the Cafeteria!" Lizette admitted.

And now, having opened her heart to the sunshine of love, Olga began to find many pleasant things springing up there. She no longer held Miss Laura and the girls at arm's length. They were all friends, even Lena Barton and Eva Bicknell, whom until now she had regarded with scornful indifference, and Sadie Page, whom she had barely tolerated for Elizabeth's sake--even these she counted now as friends; and Laura, noting the growing comradeship--seeing week by week the strengthening of the bond between the girls, said to herself, joyfully,

"It was in Olga's heart that the fire of love burst into flame, and it has leaped from heart to heart until now I believe in all my girls it is burning--'The love of man to man--the love of man to God.'"

XV

AN OPEN DOOR FOR ELIZABETH

Sadie Page burst tumultuously into Olga's room one afternoon and hardly waited to get inside the door before she cried out, "I've thought of something Elizabeth can do--something splendid."

"Well," said Olga drily, "if it is something splendid for Elizabeth, I'll excuse you for coming in without knocking."

"All right, please excuse me, I forgot," Sadie responded with unusual good nature, "I was in such a hurry to tell you. It's a way Elizabeth can

earn money at home----Now, Olga Priest, I think you're real mean to look so!" she ended with a scowl.

"Look how?" Olga laughed.

"You know. As if--as if I was just thinking of keeping Elizabeth at home."

"But weren't you?"

"No, I *wasn't*!" Sadie retorted. "At any rate--I was thinking of Elizabeth too. I was, honest, Olga."

"Well, tell me," said Olga.

"Why, you know those Christmas cakes she made?"

"Yes."

"Well, she can make them and other kinds to sell in one of the big groceries. I saw some homemade cakes in Council's to-day that didn't look half as nice as Elizabeth's and they charged a lot for them."

Olga nodded thoughtfully. "I shouldn't wonder if you'd hit upon a good plan, Sadie. But if she does that, you'll have to help her with the work at home, for she has all she can do now."

Sadie scowled. She hated housework. "Guess I have plenty to do myself," she grumbled, "with school and my silver work and all."

"But your silver work is just for yourself," Olga reminded her, "and Elizabeth has no time to do anything for herself."

"Well, anyhow, if she makes lots of cakes she'll have money for herself."

"And she's got to have money for herself," Olga said decidedly. "I've been thinking about that." Sadie wriggled uneasily. She had been

thinking about it too, and that Elizabeth would be eighteen soon, and free to go out and earn her own living, if she chose.

"Well, I must go and tell her," she said and left abruptly.

Elizabeth listened in silence to Sadie's eager plans, but the colour came and went in her face and her blue eyes were full of longing.

"O, if I could only do it--if I only *could*!" she breathed. "But I--I couldn't go around to the stores and ask them to sell for me. I never could do that!"

"Well, you don't have to. I'd do that for you. I wouldn't mind it," Sadie declared. "You just make up some of those spicy Christmas cakes and some others, a few, you know, just for samples, and I'll take 'em out for you. I know they'll sell."

"I--I'm not so sure," Elizabeth faltered.

Sadie's brows met in a black frown. "You're a regular 'fraid-cat, 'Lizabeth Page!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "How do you ever expect to do *anything* if you're scared to try! To-morrow's Sat'-day. Can't you get up early an' make some?"

It was settled that she should. There was little sleep for Elizabeth that night, so eager and excited was she, and very early in the morning she crept down to the kitchen and set to work. Before her usual rising time, Sadie ran downstairs, buttoning her dress as she went.

"Have you made 'em?" she demanded, her black eyes snapping.

"Yes," Elizabeth glanced at the clock, "I'm just going to take them out." She opened the oven door, then she gasped and her face whitened as she drew out the pans.

"My *goodness*!" cried Sadie. "Elizabeth Page--what ails 'em?"

"O--O!" wailed Elizabeth, "I must have left out the baking powder--and I never did before in all my life!"

"*Well!*" Sadie exploded. "If this is the way you're going to----" Then the misery in Elizabeth's face was too much for her. She stopped short, biting her tongue to keep back the bitter words.

Elizabeth crouched beside the oven, her tears dropping on the cakes.

"O, come now--no need to cry all over 'em--they're flat enough without any extra wetting," Sadie exclaimed after a moment's silence. "You just fling them out an' make some more after breakfast. I bet you'll never leave out the baking powder again."

"I never, never *could* again," sobbed Elizabeth.

"O, forget it, an' come on in to breakfast," Sadie said with more sympathy in her heart than in her words.

"I don't want any--I couldn't eat a mouthful. You take in the coffee, Sadie--everything else is on the table."

"Well, you just make more cakes then. They'll be all right--the next ones--I know they will," and coffee-pot in hand, Sadie whisked into the dining-room.

And the next cakes were all right. Sadie gloated over them as Elizabeth spread the icing, and added the fancy touches with pink sugar and citron.

When she had gone away with the cakes Elizabeth cooked and cleaned, washed dishes, and swept, but all the time her thoughts followed Sadie. She dared not let herself hope, and yet the time seemed endless. But at last the front door slammed, there were flying feet in the hall, and Sadie burst into the kitchen, flushed and triumphant.

"O--O Sadie--did you--will they----?" Elizabeth stumbled over the words, her breath catching in her throat.

Sadie tossed her basket on the table and bounced into the nearest chair. "Did I, and will they?" she taunted gaily. "Well, I guess I *did* and they *will*, Elizabeth Page!"

"O, do tell me, Sadie--quick!" Elizabeth begged, and she listened with absorbed attention to the story of Sadie's experiences, and could hardly believe that Mr. Burchell had really agreed to sell for her.

"I bet Miss Laura had been talking to him," Sadie ended, "for he asked me if I knew her and then said right away he'd take your cakes every Wednesday and Saturday. *Now* what you got to say?"

"N-n-nothing," cried Elizabeth, "only--if I can really, *really* sell them, I'll be most too happy to live!"

All that day Elizabeth went around with a song in her heart. The first consignment of cakes sold promptly, and then orders began to come in. It meant extra work for her, but if only she could keep on selling she would not mind that. And as the weeks slipped away, every Saturday she added to the little store of bills in her bureau drawer. Even when she had paid for her materials and Mr. Burchell's commission, and for a girl who helped her with the Saturday work, there was so much left that she counted it and recounted it with almost incredulous joy. All this her very own--she who never before had had even one dollar of her own! O, it was a lovely world after all, Elizabeth told herself joyfully.

But after a while she noticed a change in Sadie. She was still interested in the cake-making, but now it seemed a cold critical interest, lacking the warm sympathy and delight in it which she had shown at first. Elizabeth longed to ask what was wrong but she had not the courage, so she only questioned with her eyes. Maybe by-and-by Sadie would tell her. If not--with a long sigh Elizabeth would leave it there, wistfully hoping. So April came and Elizabeth was eighteen years old, though still she looked two years younger. She did not suppose that any one but herself would

remember her birthday--no one ever had through all the years. Sadie's glance seemed sharper and colder than usual that morning, and Elizabeth sorrowfully wondered why. The postman came just as Sadie was starting for school. He handed her an envelope addressed to Elizabeth, and she carried it to the kitchen.

"For *me*?" Elizabeth cried, hastily taking her hands from the dish-water. She drew from the envelope a birthday card in water-colour with Laura's initials in one corner.

"O, isn't it lovely!" she cried. "I never had a birthday--anything--before. Isn't it beautiful, Sadie?"

"Uh-huh," was all Sadie's response, but her lack of enthusiasm could not spoil Elizabeth's pleasure in the gift. Somebody remembered--Miss Laura remembered and made that just for her, and joy sang in her heart all day. And in the evening Olga came bringing a little silver pin. Elizabeth looked at it with incredulous delight.

"For *me*!" she said again. "O Olga, did you really make this for me?"

Olga laughed. "Why not?"

"I--I can't find anything to say--I want to say so much," Elizabeth cried, her lips quivering.

Olga leaned over and kissed her. "I just enjoyed making it--for you," she said.

She was almost startled at the radiance in Elizabeth's eyes then. "It has been the loveliest day of all my life!" she whispered. "I----"

They were in Elizabeth's little room, and now hurried footsteps sounded on the stairs, and Sadie pushed open the door.

"That yours?" she demanded, her sharp eyes on the pin.

Elizabeth held it towards her with a happy smile. "Olga made it for me. Isn't it lovely?"

Sadie did not answer, but plumped herself down on the narrow cot. When Olga had gone, Sadie still sat there, her black eyes cold and unfriendly. "Don't see why you lugged Olga up here," she began.

"She asked me to."

"Humph!" Sadie grunted.

"Sadie," Elizabeth said, gently, "what is the matter? Have I done anything you don't like?"

"I didn't say so."

"No, but you've been different to me lately, and I don't know why. You were so nice a few weeks ago--you don't know how glad it made me. I hoped we were going to be real sisters, but now," she drew a long sorrowful breath, "it is as it used to be."

Sadie, swinging one foot, gnawed at a fingernail. Finally, "I helped you start the cake-making," she reminded.

"I know--I never forget it," Elizabeth said warmly.

"You've made a lot of money----"

"It seems a lot to me--forty-seven dollars--just think of it! I haven't spent any except for materials."

"And you'll make more."

"Yes, but Mr. Burchell says cakes don't sell after it gets hot. He won't want any after May."

"That's four or five weeks longer. You'll have enough to get you heaps of fine clothes," Sadie flung out enviously, with one of her needle-sharp glances.

"O--clothes!" returned Elizabeth slightly. "I suppose I must have a few--shoes, and a plain hat and a blue serge skirt, and some blouses--they won't cost much."

"Then what *are* you going to do with all that money?" Sadie blurted out the question impatiently.

Elizabeth smiled into the frowning face--a beautiful happy smile--as she answered gently, "I'll tell you, Sadie. I've been longing to tell you only--only you've held me off so lately. I'm going to send two girls to Camp Nepahwin for three weeks in August. I'm one of the girls and--you are the other."

For once in her life Sadie Page was genuinely astonished and genuinely ashamed. For a long moment she sat quite still, the colour slowly mounting in her face until it flamed. Then, all the sharpness gone from her voice, she stammered, "I--I--Elizabeth, I never *thought* of such a thing as you paying for me. I--think you're real good!" and she was gone.

Elizabeth looked after her with a smile, all the shadows gone from her blue eyes.

One hot evening a week later, Elizabeth and Sadie met Lizette at Olga's door. She silently led the way to her own room.

"Olga's sick," she said, dropping wearily down on the bed.

"What's the matter?" Sadie demanded before Elizabeth could speak.

"It's a fever. The doctor can't tell yet whether it's typhoid or malarial, but she's very sick. The doctor has sent a nurse to take care of her."

"I wish I could help take care of her," Elizabeth said earnestly.

"Well, you can't!" Sadie snapped out. "And, anyhow, she doesn't need you if she has a nurse."

"But the nurse must sleep sometimes--I could help then. O Lizette, ask Olga to let me," Elizabeth pleaded.

"She won't." Lizette shook her head. "Much as ever she'll let me do anything. I get the meals for the nurse--Olga takes only milk. The nurse says she can do with only four hours' sleep, and I can see to Olga that little time."

"No," Elizabeth said decidedly, "no, Lizette, you have your work at the shop and the cooking. You mustn't do more than that. I can come after supper--at eight o'clock--and stay till twelve----"

"You couldn't go home all alone at midnight--you know you couldn't," Sadie interrupted.

"I needn't to. I could sleep in a chair till morning."

"As to that, you could sleep on the nurse's cot, I guess," Lizette admitted. "Well, if Olga will let you--I'll ask her."

But as she started up Elizabeth gently pushed her back. "No, don't ask her. I'll just come to-morrow night, anyway."

"Let it go so, then," Lizette answered. "Maybe it will be best, for I'm pretty well tired out myself with the heat, and worrying over Olga, and all. I knew she was overworking but I couldn't help it."

On the way home Elizabeth was silent until Sadie broke out gloomily, "I s'pose if she don't get better you won't go to the camp, 'Lizabeth."

"O, *no*, I couldn't go away and leave her sick--of course, I couldn't."

"Huh!" growled Sadie. "You don't think about *me*, only just about Olga, and she isn't your sister."

At another time Elizabeth would have smiled at this belated claim of relationship, but now she said only, "Olga has been so good to me, Sadie--I never can forget it--and now when I have a chance to do a little for her, I'm so *glad* to do it! I couldn't enjoy the camp if I left her here sick, but it won't make any difference to you. You can go just the same."

Sadie's face cleared at that. "We-ell," she agreed, "I might just as well go. I couldn't do anything much for Olga if I stayed; and maybe, anyhow, she'll get well before the tenth. I'm most sure she will."

"O, I hope so," Elizabeth sighed, but she was not thinking of the camp.

Anxious weeks followed, for Olga was very sick. Day after day the fever held her in restless misery, and when at last it yielded to the treatment, it left her weak and worn--the shadow of her former self.

Then one morning Miss Laura came, and carried her and the nurse off to the yacht, and there followed quiet, restful, beautiful days for Olga--such days as she had never dreamed of. Judge Haven and Jim, and Jo Barton were on the yacht, but she saw little of any one except Miss Laura and the nurse, and day by day strength came back to her body as the joy of life flooded her soul.

One night sitting on deck in the moonlight, she said suddenly, "Miss Laura, I'm glad of this sickness."

"Why?"

"Because I've learned a big lesson. I've learned why Camp Fire Girls must 'Hold on to health.' I didn't know before, else I would not have been so careless--so wicked. I see now that it was all my own fault. I should not have been sick if I had taken care of myself--if I had held on to my health as you tried so hard to make me do."

"Yes, dear, you had to have a hard lesson because you had always had such splendid health that you didn't know what it would mean to lose it."

"Yes," Olga agreed, "I didn't believe that I could get sick--I was so strong. And down in my heart I really half believed that people need not be sick--that it was mostly imagination. I shall not be so uncharitable after this."

"Girls need not be sick many times when they are," Laura said, "if they would be more careful and reasonable."

"I know. I won't go with wet feet any more," Olga promised, "and I won't work fourteen hours a day and go without eating, as I've been doing this summer. You see, Miss Laura, when I got the order for all that silver work, I knew that if I could fill it satisfactorily, it would mean many other orders. And I did--I finished the last piece the day I was taken sick. But now the money I got for it will go to the doctor and the nurse, and I've lost all this time and other work. And that isn't all. My sickness made it harder for Lizette and Elizabeth. I can't forgive myself for that. They were so good to me, and so were all the Camp Fire Girls! Every single one of them came to see me, some of them many times, and they brought so many things, and all wanted to stay and help--O, they are the dearest girls!"

Laura's eyes searched the eyes of the other in the moonlight.

"Olga, are you happy?" she asked softly.

Olga caught her breath and for a moment was silent. When she spoke there was wonder and a great joy in her voice. "O, I am--I am!" she said. "And--and I believe I have been for a long time, but I never realised it till this minute. I didn't *want* to be happy--I didn't mean to be--after mother died. I shut my heart tight and wouldn't see anything pleasant or happy in all my world. It was so when I went to the camp last year. I went just to please Miss Grandis because she had gotten me into the Arts and Crafts work, and though I wanted to refuse, I couldn't, when she asked me to go. But I'm so glad now that I went--so *glad*! Just think if I had not gone, and

had never known you and Elizabeth, and Lizette, and the others! Miss Laura, I can't ever be half glad enough for all that the Camp Fire has done for me."

"You will pay it all back--to others, Olga," Laura said gently, her eyes shining. "When I made you my Torch Bearer, you did not realise the importance of holding on to health, nor the duty as well as privilege of being happy. Now you do."

"O, I do--I *do*!" the girl cried earnestly.

"So now my Torch Bearer is ready to lead others."

"I'll be glad to do it now. I want to 'pass on' all that you and the girls have done for me. It will take a lifetime to do it, though. And--I'm not half good enough for a Torch Bearer, Miss Laura."

"If you thought you were good enough I shouldn't want you to be one," Laura answered.

XVI

CAMP FIRE GIRLS AND THE FLAG

Miss Laura's girls had been at the camp a few days when Sadie Page one morning raced breathlessly up to a group of them, crying out, "There's a big white yacht coming--I saw it from the Lookout. Do you s'pose it's Judge Haven's?"

"Won't it be splendid if it is--if it's bringing Miss Laura and Olga!" Frances Chapin cried. "Could you see the name, Sadie?"

"No, it was too far off."

"Let's borrow Miss Anne's glass," cried two or three voices, and Frances ran off in search of Anne Wentworth. When she returned with the glass, they all rushed over to the Lookout. The yacht was just dropping anchor as they turned the glass upon it and Frances cried out,

"O, it is--it is! I can read the name easily. Here, look!" she surrendered the glass to Elsie.

"It *is* the Sea Gull," Elsie confirmed her, "and they are lowering a boat already."

"O, tell us if Miss Laura gets into it, and Olga," cried Lizette.

"Two men--sailors, I suppose, two girls, and two boys," Elsie announced.

"Then it's Miss Laura and Olga and Jim and Jo Barton," Frances cried joyfully.

[Illustration: A favorite rendezvous at the camp]

"Let's hurry down to the landing to meet them," Mary Hastings proposed, and instantly the whole group turned and raced back to camp to leave the

glass, with the joyous announcement, "Miss Laura's coming, and Olga. We're going to the landing to meet them." And waiting for no response they sped through the pines to the landing-steps, Elsie snatching up a flag as she passed her own tent.

"Let's all go," one of the other girls cried, but Miss Anne said,

"No, let Miss Laura's girls have the first greeting--they all love her so! But we might go to the Lookout and wave her a welcome from there."

"What shall we wave?" some one asked, and another cried, "O, towels, handkerchiefs--anything. But *hurry!*" and they did, reaching the Lookout breathless and laughing, to see the yacht resting like a great bird on the blue water, and the small boat already nearing the point.

"Get your breath, girls, then--the wohelo cheer," said Miss Anne.

Two score young voices followed her lead, and as they chanted, the white banners fluttered in the breeze. Instantly there came a response from the boat in fluttering handkerchiefs and waving caps, while the girls below on the landing echoed back the wohelo greeting.

But when the boat rounded the point the voices of those on the landing wavered into silence. They were too glad to sing as they saw Laura and Olga coming back to them--they could only wait in silence. Lizette's lips were quivering nervously and Elizabeth's blue eyes were full of happy tears. Even Sadie for once was silent, but she waved her handkerchief frantically to the two boys who were gaily swinging their caps. When the boat reached the landing, however, and the girls crowded about Laura and Olga, tongues were loosened, and everybody talked.

"How well Olga looks!" Mary cried.

"Doesn't she? I'm so proud of her for gaining so fast!" Laura laughed.

"I couldn't help gaining with all she has done for me," Olga said with a grateful glance.

"And you've come to stay? Do say you have, Miss Laura," the girls begged.

"Of course, we're going to stay--we've been homesick for the camp," Laura answered.

"That's splendid. We've missed you so!" they cried.

"The camp's fine. I'm having the time of my life!" Sadie declared, and added, "Elizabeth, you haven't said one word."

"She doesn't need to," Olga put in quickly, her hand on Elizabeth's shoulder.

They were climbing the steps now, and at the camp they were greeted with another song of welcome from the Guardians and the rest of the girls, and then Laura put Olga into the most comfortable hammock to rest and, leaving Elizabeth beside her, carried the others off for a talk.

That night the supper was a festival. The girls had gathered masses of purple asters with which they had filled every available dish to decorate the tables, the mantelpiece, and even the tents where the newcomers were to sleep. Miss Anne had brought to camp a big box of tiny tapers, and these stuck in yellow apples made a glow of light along the tables.

Nobody appreciated all this more than Jim. With his hands in his pockets he stood looking about admiringly, and finally expressed his opinion thus: "Gee, but it's pretty! Camp Fire Girls beat the Scouts some ways, if they ain't so patriotic."

Instantly there was an outburst of reproach and denial from Miss Laura's girls.

"O, come, Jim, that's not fair!"

"We're *just* as patriotic as the Scouts!"

"Boy Scouts can't hold a candle to Camp Fire Girls *any* way!"

"We'll put you out if you go back on Camp Fire Girls, Jim."

Jim, flushed and a little bewildered at the storm he had raised, instinctively sidled towards Laura, while Jo, close behind him, chuckled, "Started a hornets' nest that time, ol' feller."

Laura, her arm about the boy's shoulders, quickly interposed. "We'll let Jim explain another time. I know he thinks Camp Fire Girls are the nicest girls there are, don't you, Jim?"

"Sure!" Jim assented hastily, and peace was restored--for the time.

But the girls did not forget nor allow Jim to. The next night after supper they swooped down on him.

"Now tell us, Jim," Lena Barton began, "why you think Boy Scoots are more patriotic than we are."

"Tisn't Boy *Scoots*--you know it isn't," Jim countered, flushing.

"O, excuse me." Lena bowed politely. "I only had one letter wrong, and, anyhow, they do scoot, don't they? Well, Boy Scouts then, if you like that better."

"They love the flag better'n you do--*lots* better!" Jim declared with conviction.

"Prove it! Prove it!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Er--er----" Jim choked and stammered, searching desperately for words. "You've got an awful nice Camp Fire room at Miss Laura's, but you haven't even a little teeny flag in it, and Scouts *always* have a flag in their rooms--don't they, Jo?" he ended in triumph.

"You bet they do!" Jo stoutly supported his friend.

"Ho! That doesn't prove anything. Besides, we'll *have* a flag when we go back," Lena asserted promptly.

"Well, anyhow, girls an' women can't fight for the flag, so of course, they *can't* be so patriotic," Jim declared.

"Can't, eh? How about the women that go to nurse the wounded men?" said Mary.

"And the women that send their husbands and sons to fight?" added Elsie.

"And how about----" began another girl, but Laura's hand falling lightly on her lips, cut short the question, and then Laura dropped down on the grass pulling Jim down beside her. Holding his hand in both hers, and softly patting it, she said, "Sit down, girls, and we'll talk this matter over. Jim's hardly big enough or old enough to face you all at once. But, honestly, don't you think there is some truth in what he says? As Camp Fire Girls, do we think as much about patriotism as the Scouts do? Elsie, you have a Scout brother, what do you think about it?"

Elsie laughed but flushed a little too as she answered, "I hate to admit it, but I don't think we do."

"Time we did then. We can't have any Boy Scouts getting ahead of us," Lena declared emphatically.

Jim, gathering courage from Miss Laura's championship, looked up with a mischievous smile. "Bet you can't tell about the stars and stripes in the flag," he said.

"Can you? How many can?" Miss Laura looked about the group. "Elsie, Frances--and Mary--I see you can, and nobody else is sure. How does it

happen?" There was a twinkle now in her eyes. "Is there any special reason for you three being better posted than the others?"

The three girls exchanged smiling glances, and Elsie admitted reluctantly, "I think there is--a Boy Scout reason--isn't there, Mary?" and as Mary Hastings nodded, Elsie went on, "You know my brother Jack is the most loyal of Scouts, and before he was old enough to be one, he had learned all the things that a boy has to know to join--and to describe the flag is one of those things. He discovered one day that I didn't know how many stars there are on it and how they are arranged, and he was so dreadfully distressed and mortified at my ignorance that I had to take a flag lesson from him on the spot--and it was a thorough one."

"Uh huh!" Jim triumphed under his breath, but the girls heard and there was a shout of laughter. Over the boy's head Laura's laughing eyes swept the group.

"Jim," she said, "will you ask Miss Anne to lend us her flag for a few minutes?"

"Won't ours do? Jo'n' I've got one," Jim cried instantly, and as Miss Laura nodded, he scampered off.

"I think Jim has won, girls," she said, and then the laughter dying out of her eyes, added gravely, "Really I quite agree with him. I think we--I mean our own Camp Fire--have not given as much thought to patriotism as we ought. There have been so many things for us to talk about and work for! But we'll learn the flag to-day, and when we go home, it may be well for us to arrange a sort of 'course' in patriotism for the coming year. Of all girls in America, those who live in Washington ought to be the most interested in their own country. We will all be more patriotic--better Americans--a year from now."

Jim came running back with a small silk flag. He held it up proudly for the inspection of the girls, and it was safe to say that they would all

remember that brief object lesson. It was Lena whose eyes lingered longest on the boy's eager face as he looked at the flag.

"He does--he really *loves* it," she said wonderingly to Elsie standing beside her. "He's right. We girls don't care for it that way--honest we don't."

"Maybe not just for the flag," Elsie admitted, "but we care just as much as boys do for our country. Don't you think we do, Miss Laura?"

"I'm not sure, Elsie. You see many boys look forward to a soldier's life, and most of them feel that they may some time have to fight for their flag--their country--and so perhaps they think more about it than girls do. And patriotism is made prominent among the Scouts."

"They always salute the flag wherever they see it," Mary said.

"Must keep 'em busy in Washington," Lena observed.

"It does. Jim is forever saluting it when he is out with me," Laura replied, "but he never seems to tire of it, and I like to see him do it."

"The girls salute it in the schools--you know we have Flag Day every year," Frances added.

"Yes, and it is a good thing. There is no danger of any of us caring too much for our country or the flag that represents it. When I catch sight of our flag in a foreign land I always want to kiss it."

"Can't we have one in our Camp Fire room when we go back?" Lena asked.

"We surely will. I'm really quite ashamed of myself for not having one long ago. We owe something--do we not?--to a going-to-be Boy Scout for reminding us?" Laura said.

They admitted that they did. "But, anyhow," Frances Chapin added, "even if they do think more about the *flag*, I won't admit that Scouts love their country any more than we Camp Fire Girls do. We are *quite* as patriotic as any Boy Scouts."

"And that's right!" Lena flung out as the group separated.

XVII

SONIA

"O dear, I did hope it wouldn't be awfully hot when we got back, but it is," Lizette Stone sighed on the day they returned from camp. "Just think of the breeze on the Lookout this very minute!"

Olga glanced over her shoulder with a smile as she threw open her door. "Let's pretend it's cool here too," she said. "I'm so thankful to be well and strong again that I'm determined to be satisfied with things as they are. The camp was lovely and Miss Laura and the girls were dear, but this is home, and my work is waiting for me, and I'm *able to do it*. And you have your lovely work too, Lizette, and your home corner across the hall."

Lizette looked at her half wondering, half envious, as she slowly pulled out her hatpins. "I never knew a fever to change a girl as that one changed you, Olga Priest," she said.

"Is the change for the better?"

"Yes, it is, but----"

"But what?" Olga questioned, half laughing, yet a little curious too.

[Illustration: "Just think of the Lookout this very minute!"]

"Well--all is, I can't keep up with you," Lizette dropped unconsciously into one of her country phrasings. "I can't help getting into the doleful

dumps sometimes, and I can't--I just *can't* be happy and contented with the mercury at ninety-three. I guess it's easier for some folks to stand the heat than it is for others."

"I think it is," Olga admitted. "Give me your hat. Now take that fan and sit there by the window till I come back. I'm not so tired as you are, and I must get something for our supper."

While she was gone Lizette sat thinking of the Camp with its shady woods and blue water and wishing herself back there. She had had three weeks there, but a hateful little imp was whispering in her ear that some of the girls were staying four or five weeks, and it wasn't fair--it wasn't *fair*! Of course it was better to earn her living doing embroidery than in Goldstein's store, but still, some girls didn't have to earn their living at all, and----

The door opened and Olga came breezily in, her hands full of bundles. "I really ought to have taken a basket," she said. "There's the nicest little home bakery opened just around the corner--I got bread there."

"I'm not a bit hungry," Lizette said listlessly, then started up, crying out, "Well, I am ashamed of myself! I meant to have the table set when you came back, and I forgot all about it."

"Never mind--I'll have it ready in a minute. Sit still, Lizette."

But Lizette insisted upon helping, and her face brightened as Olga set forth fresh bread, nut cakes, ice cold milk, and a dish of sliced peaches.

"Weren't you mistaken?" Olga asked with a laugh. "Aren't you a little bit hungry?"

"Yes, I am. How good that bread looks--and the peaches."

"After all it is rather nice to be back here at our own little table, isn't it?" Olga asked as they lingered over the meal.

Lizette looked at her curiously. "Olga Priest, what makes you so happy to-night?" she demanded. "I never saw you so before."

"Maybe not quite so happy, but wasn't I happy all the time at camp? Wasn't I, Lizette?"

"Yes--yes, you were, only I didn't notice it so much there with all the girls, and something always going on. You never were so here before. Sometimes you wouldn't smile for days at a time."

"I know. I hadn't realised then that I could be happy if I'd let myself be--and that I had no right not to."

"No *right* not to," Lizette echoed with a puzzled frown. "I don't see *that*. I should think anybody might have the privilege of being blue if she likes."

"No." Olga shook her head with decision. "No, not when she has health, and work that she likes, and friends. A girl has no right to be unhappy under those conditions--and I've found it out at last. I'm going to keep my Camp Fire promises now as I never have done."

After a little silence she went on, "I've such beautiful plans for our Camp Fire this year! One of them is to learn all we can about our country. We can't have Jim," laughter flashed into her eyes as she thought of him, "thinking us less patriotic than his beloved Scouts. And we can see and learn so much right here in Washington! I'm ashamed to think how little I know about this beautiful city where I've lived all my life. I mean to 'know my Washington' thoroughly before I'm a year older."

Lizette did not seem much interested in patriotism, but she laughed over the remembrance of the indignation of the girls at Jim's remark about their lack of it. "He did look so plucky, facing us all that day, didn't he!" she said. "And he was scared too at the rumpus he had raised; but all the same he didn't back down."

"No, Jim wouldn't back down if he thought he was right no matter how scared he might be inside."

"Well," Lizette yawned, "I'm so sleepy I can hardly hold my eyes open. Let's wash the dishes and then I'm going straight to bed."

She came in to breakfast the next morning in a different mood.

"Didn't we have a glorious rain in the night!" she cried gaily. "And it left a lovely cool breeze behind it. Last night I felt like a wet rag, but this morning I'm a different creature. It *is* good to be 'home' again, Olga, and I don't mind going back to the shop."

"That's good!" Olga's eyes were shining as they had shone the night before.

The two set off together after breakfast, and wished each other good luck as they parted at the door of Miss Bayly's shop. Lizette came back at night jubilant. "I got my good luck, Olga," she cried. "I'm to have eight a week now. Isn't that fine?"

"Indeed it is--congratulations, Lizette. And I had my good luck too--better than I dared hope for--two splendid orders. Now we can both settle down to work and get a nice start before the next Camp Fire meeting. I'm going to try to keep half a day a week free for our 'learning Washington' trips."

"Personally conducted?" Lizette laughed.

"Personally conducted. Your company is solicited, Miss Stone, whenever your other engagements will permit."

Over the tea-table they talked of work and Camp Fire plans, and then Lizette went off to her own "corner" and Olga took up a book. She had been reading for an hour when her quick ears caught the sound of hesitating steps outside her door--steps that seemed to linger uncertainly.

Thinking that some stranger might have wandered in from the street, she rose and quietly slipped her bolt. As she did so there came a knock at the door. She stood still, listening intently. No one ever came to her door except the landlady or the Camp Fire Girls, and none of them would knock in this hesitating fashion. She was not in the least timid, and when the knock was repeated she opened the door. She found herself facing a woman, young, in a soiled and wrinkled dress and shabby hat, and carrying a baby in her arms.

"Olga--it is Olga?" the woman exclaimed half doubtfully.

Olga did not answer. She stood staring into the woman's face and suddenly her own whitened and her eyes widened with dismay.

"You?" she said under her breath. "*You!*"

"Yes, I--Sonia. Aren't you going to let me in?"

For an instant Olga hesitated, then she stood aside, but in that moment all the happy hopefulness seemed to melt out of her heart. It was as if a black shadow of disaster had entered the quiet room at the heels of the draggled woman and her child.

"This is a warm welcome, I must say, to your own sister," Sonia said in a querulous tone, as she dropped into the easiest chair and laid the child across her knees. It made no sound, but lay as it was placed, its eyes half closed and its tiny face pinched and colourless.

"I--I can't realise that it is really--you," Olga said. "Where did you come from, and how did you find me?"

"I came from--many places. As to finding you--that was easy. You are not so far from the old neighbourhood where I left you."

"Yes--you left me," Olga echoed slowly, her face dark with the old sombre gloom. "You left me, a child of thirteen, with no money, and mother--dying!"

"I suppose it was rather hard on you, but you were always a plucky one, and I knew well enough you would pull through somehow. As to mother, of course I didn't know--she'd been ailing so long," Sonia defended herself, "and Dick wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. I *had* to go with him."

Olga was silent, but in her heart a fierce battle was raging. She knew her sister--knew her selfish disregard of the rights or wishes of others, and she realised that much might depend on what was said now.

"Well?" Sonia questioned, breaking the silence abruptly.

Olga drew a long weary breath. "I--I can't think, Sonia," she said. "You have taken me so by surprise. I don't know what to say."

"I suppose you're not going to turn us into the street to-night--the baby and me?"

"Of course not," Olga answered, and added, "Is the baby sick?"

Sonia's eyes rested for a moment on the small pallid face, but there was no softening in them when she looked up again. "She's never been well. The first one died--the boy. This one cried day and night for weeks after she came. Dick couldn't stand it, and no wonder. That's the reason he cleared out--one reason."

"His own child!" cried Olga indignantly, and as she looked at the pitiful white face her heart warmed towards the little creature, She held out her hands. "Let me take her."

Sonia promptly transferred the baby to her sister's arms, and rising, crossed to the small sleeping-room.

"You're pretty well fixed here, with two rooms," she remarked.

"It's hardly more than one--the bedroom is so small."

"What do you do for a living?" Sonia demanded.

Olga told her.

"Hm. Any money in it?"

"I make a living, but I had a long sickness last summer and it took all I had and more to pay the bills."

"O well," replied Sonia carelessly, "you'll earn more. You look well enough now." She stretched her arms and yawned. "I'm dead tired. How about sleeping? That single bed won't hold the three of us."

"You can sleep there--I'll sleep on the floor to-night. There's no other way," Olga answered.

"All right then. I'll get to bed in a hurry," and taking the child from her sister, Sonia undressed it as carelessly as if it had been a doll. The baby half opened its heavy eyes and whimpered a little, but did not really awaken.

When Sonia and the child were in bed, Olga went across to Lizette's room. Lizette's welcoming smile vanished at sight of the stern set face, and she drew Olga quickly in and shut the door.

"O, what is it? What has happened, Olga?" she cried anxiously.

"My sister has come with her baby. I don't know how long she will stay." Olga spoke in a dull lifeless voice. "I came to tell you, so that you could get your breakfast somewhere else. You wouldn't enjoy having it with me--now."

"O Olga, I'm so sorry--so *sorry*!" Lizette cried, her hands on her friend's shoulders, her voice full of warm sympathy.

"I know, Lizette," Olga answered, a quivering smile stirring for an instant the old hard line of her set lips. Then she turned away, forgetting to say good-night. When the door closed behind her, Lizette's eyes were full of tears.

"O, it's a shame--a shame!" she said aloud. "To think how happy she was only last night, and now--now she looks as she did a year ago before Elizabeth went to the camp. O, I wonder why that sister had to come back!"

Lizette lay awake long that night, her heart full of sympathy for her friend, and Olga, lying on her hard bed on the floor, did not sleep at all. She went out early to the market, and coming back, prepared breakfast, but when she called her sister, Sonia answered drowsily:

"I'm too tired to get up, Olga. Bring me some coffee and toast here, will you?"

Olga carried her a tray, and Sonia ate and drank and then turned over and went to sleep again, and Olga, having washed the dishes, went off to the school. All day she worked steadily, forcing back the thoughts that crowded continually into her mind; but when she turned homewards the dark thoughts swooped down upon her like a flock of ravens, blotting out all her happy hopes and joyous plans, for she knew--only too well she knew--what she had to expect if Sonia remained.

"Well, you've come at last!" was her sister's greeting. "I hope you've brought something nice for supper. I'm nearly starved. And you didn't leave half enough milk for the baby."

"I left plenty for your dinner," Olga answered, "and I thought you could get more milk for the baby if you wanted it."

"Get more! How could I get it without money? And you didn't leave me a penny," Sonia complained.

Olga brought out a bottle of malted milk. "That will do for to-night, won't it?" she said, trying to speak cheerfully.

"I don't know anything about this stuff." Sonia was reading the label with a scowl. "You'll have to fix it; and do hurry, for she's been fretting for an hour."

Without a word, Olga prepared the food and handed it to her sister; then she set about getting supper; but when it was ready she felt suddenly too tired to eat. Sonia ate heartily, however, remarking with a glance at Olga's empty plate, "I suppose you got a good dinner down town."

"I haven't eaten a mouthful since breakfast," Olga told her wearily.

"O well," Sonia returned, "some folks don't need much food, but I do. If I don't have three solid meals a day I'm not fit for anything." Then looking at the baby lying on a pillow in a chair beside her, she added, "Really she seems to like that malted stuff. You'd better bring back another bottle to-morrow. There isn't much left in this one."

"Isn't that my dress you have on?" Olga asked suddenly.

"Yes, I had to have something fresh--mine was so mussed and dirty," Sonia replied lightly. "Lucky for me we're about the same size."

"But not lucky for me," was Olga's thought.

For a week things went on so--Sonia occasionally offering to wash the dishes, but leaving her sister to do everything else. Then one night Olga found her best suit in a heap on the closet floor. Picking it up she spoke sharply. "Sonia, have you been wearing this suit of mine?"

"Well, what if I have? You needn't look so savage about it!" Sonia retorted. "I have to have something decent to wear on the street, don't I?"

"Not if you have nothing decent of your own," Olga flashed back. "Sonia, you have no *right* to wear my things so--without asking!"

With a provoking smile Sonia responded, "I knew better than to ask. I knew you'd make a fuss about it. If you don't want me to wear your clothes why don't you give me money to buy something decent for myself? Then I wouldn't need to borrow."

Olga's thoughts were in such an angry whirl that for a moment she dared not trust herself to speak. She shook out the suit and hung it up, then she went slowly across the room and sat down facing her sister.

"Sonia," she began, "we can't go on in this way--I cannot endure it. Now let us have a plain understanding. You came here of your own choice--not on my invitation. What are your plans? Do you mean to stay on here indefinitely?"

"Why, of course. Where else should I stay?"

"Then," said Olga decidedly, "you must help pay our expenses. You are well and strong. Why should you expect me to support you?"

"Why? Because you have a trade and I have not, for one reason. And besides, there's the baby--I can't leave her to go out to work." There was a note of triumph in Sonia's voice.

"You could get work to do at home--sewing, embroidery, knitting--or something."

"Or something!" There was fretful impatience now in Sonia's tone. "I hate sewing--any kind of sewing. You know I always did."

"Then what will you do?"

Sonia sat looking down in sulky silence at the baby.

Olga went on, "If there is no work you can do at home, you must find something outside. You can go into a store as you did before you were married."

"And I guess," Sonia broke out angrily, "if you'd ever stood behind a counter from eight in the morning to six at night, you'd know how nice *that* is! You earn enough. I think it's real mean and stingy of you to grudge a share of it to this poor sick baby--and me. I do so!"

"I don't grudge anything to the baby, Sonia, though I do think it is your business to provide for her, not mine. But I say again it is not right for me to have to support you, and I am not willing to do it. It is best to speak plainly once for all."

"Well, I should say you *were* speaking plainly," Sonia flung out with an unpleasant smile. She rocked with a quick motion, her brows drawn into a frown. "How can I go into a store, even if I could get a place? I couldn't take the baby with me," she muttered.

"I could bring my work home--most of it--and you could leave the baby with me."

"Ah ha! I knew it. I knew you could do your work here if you wanted to," Sonia triumphed, pointing to the bench in the corner. "You just don't want to stay here with me." Olga made no denial and her sister went on in a complaining tone, "Anyhow I'd like to know how I'm going to get a place anywhere when I've no decent clothes. You know it makes all the difference how one is dressed."

"That is true," Olga admitted, "but, Sonia, I cannot buy you a suit. I haven't the money."

"You could borrow it."

Olga's face flushed. "I've never borrowed a cent in my life or bought *anything* on credit, except--mother's coffin," she said passionately. "And I did night work till I paid for that. I cannot run in debt. I *will* not!"

Sonia shrugged her shoulders. "Well then, if you want me to get a place, you'll just have to let me wear that suit of yours that you are so choice of."

Olga was silent. It was true that Sonia's chance of securing employment would be small if she sought it in the shabby clothes which she had. But Olga needed that suit. The money which would have bought a new one had paid her doctor's bill. Still--the important thing was to get Sonia to work. "I suppose," she said slowly, "I shall have to let you wear it, but, Sonia, you *must* realise how it is, and do your best to find a place soon. Will you do that?"

"Why, of course," returned Sonia with the light laugh that always irritated her sister. "You don't suppose I like being dependent on you, do you?"

"I don't think you'd mind, if I would give you money whenever you want it."

Again Sonia laughed. "But that's not imaginable, you know," she answered airily. "It's like drawing eyeteeth to get a dollar out of you. You're a perfect miser, Olga Priest."

Olga let that pass. "I had intended to keep my suit in Lizette's closet after this, but I will leave it here if you will promise to begin to-morrow to look for work. Will you promise?"

"You certainly are the limit!" Sonia cried impatiently. "I believe you grudge me every mouthful I eat, and the baby her milk too--poor little soul!" She caught up the baby and kissed it.

"Will you promise, Sonia?" Olga repeated.

Sonia dropped the baby on her lap again. "Of *course* I promise. I told you so before. Now for pity's sake give me a little peace!" she exclaimed.

XVIII

THE TORCH UPLIFTED

So the next day Olga brought home her work, and Sonia, wearing not only her sister's best suit but her hat, shoes, and gloves as well, set off down town. She departed with a distinctly holiday air, tossing from the doorway a kiss to the baby and a good-bye to Olga. But Olga cherished small hope of her success. She felt no confidence in her sister's sincerity, and did not believe that she really wanted to find work.

For once the baby was awake--usually she seemed half asleep, lying where she was put, and only stirring occasionally with weak whimpering cries. But this morning the blue eyes were open, and Olga stopped beside the chair in which the baby was lying and looked down at the small face, so pathetically grave and quiet.

"You poor little mortal," she said, "I wonder what life holds for you--if you live. I almost hope you won't, for it doesn't seem as if there's much chance for you."

The solemn blue eyes stared up at her as if the baby too were wondering what chance there was for her. Olga laid her face for a moment against one little white cheek; then pulling out her bench she set to work.

At twelve o'clock Sonia came back. "O dear!" she exclaimed with a swift glance around the room, "I hoped you'd have dinner ready, Olga. I'm tired to death."

Without a word Olga put aside her work and went to the gas stove. Sonia pulled off her shoes--Olga's shoes--and took off Olga's hat, and rocked until the meal was ready.

"What luck did you have?" Olga inquired when they were at the table.

"Not a bit. I tell you, Olga, you're a mighty lucky girl to have that work to do." She nodded towards the bench.

Olga ignored that. "Where did you try?" she asked.

"Well, I tried at Woodward & Lothrop's." Sonia's tone was distinctly sulky. "They hadn't any vacancy--or anyhow they said so."

"They always have a long waiting-list, I know. Did you leave your name?"

"No, I didn't. What was the use with scores ahead of me?"

"And where else did you try?"

"I didn't try *anywhere* else!" Sonia said with a defiant lift of her chin.

"You needn't think, Olga, that you can drive me like a slave just because I am staying with you. I'm going to take my time about this business, and don't you forget it!"

Olga waited until she could speak quietly; then she said, "Sonia, there is one thing you've got to understand. I *must* have peace. I cannot do my work if there is to be discord and friction all the time between you and me."

"It's your own fault," Sonia retorted. "I'm peaceful enough if I'm let alone. I let you alone."

"But, Sonia, don't you see that we can't go on this way?" Olga pleaded.

"Don't you feel that you ought to pay half our expenses if you stay with me?"

"No, I don't. Why should I pay half?" Sonia demanded. "Your rent is no higher because I am here."

"No, but I have to sleep on the floor, and it is not very restful as you would find if you tried it once."

"Well, why don't you buy a cot then? You could get one for two dollars."

"I need the two dollars for other things," Olga answered wearily. "Do you mean, Sonia, that you are not going to look for a place anywhere else?"

"O, I'll look--but I won't be hurried about it," Sonia declared moodily.

"Well," Olga spoke with deliberation, "if that is your attitude, there is but one thing for me to do, and that is to go away from here."

"Olga! You couldn't be that *mean*!" Sonia sat up straight and stared with startled eyes at the grave face opposite her.

"Think, Sonia," said Olga in a low voice, though her heart was beating furiously, "how it would seem to you if I should refuse to work and expect you to support me."

"That's different," Sonia muttered sullenly.

"How is it different?"

"Because you've got your work--I haven't any."

"But you might have if you would."

"Much you know about it! Did you ever try to find a place in a store?"

"When I was thirteen and you left mother and me"--Olga's voice was very low now, but it thrilled with bitter memories--"I walked the streets for three long days hunting for work, and I found it at last in a laundry where I stood from seven in the morning till six at night, with only fifteen minutes at noon. And I stayed there while mother lived, going back to her to care for her through those long dreadful nights of misery. That is what I know about hard work, Sonia!"

It was Sonia's turn now to be silent. There was something in Olga's white face and blazing eyes that stilled even her flippant tongue. For a moment her thoughts drifted back, and perhaps for the first time she fully realised

what her going then had meant to the little sister upon whose shoulders she had left the heavy burden. But she banished these unpleasant memories with a shrug. "O well, all that's past and gone--no use in raking it up again," she declared.

"No, no use," Olga admitted. "But, Sonia, I want you to realise that I mean just what I say. You have come here of your own accord. If you stay you must share our expenses. If you will not, I surely shall go away, and leave you to pay all yourself."

Seeing that her sister was determined, Sonia suddenly melted into weak tears. "You are so hard, Olga!" she sobbed. "I don't believe you have any heart at all."

"Maybe not," was the grim response. "I've thought sometimes it was broken--or frozen--five years ago."

"You keep harking back to that!" Sonia moaned. "I'm not the first girl that has gone away with the man she loved. You have no sympathy--you make no allowances. And I didn't realise how sick mother was. If I had----"

"If you had," Olga interrupted, "you would have done exactly the same. But let that pass. Are you going to give me the promise that I ask?"

"What do you want me to promise?" Sonia evaded.

"I want you to promise that you will go out every week day and look for work--that you will keep trying until you do find it. Will you?"

"It seems I can't help myself." Sonia's voice was still sulky.

"Will you? I must have your promise," Olga insisted, and finally Sonia flung out an angry,

"Yes!"

Thereafter Olga worked at home and her sister went out morning or afternoon--sometimes both; but she found no position.

"They all want younger girls--chits of sixteen or seventeen," she complained, "or else those who have had large experience. They won't give me a chance."

Olga crowded down her doubts. Perhaps it was all true--perhaps Sonia really had honestly tried, but the doubts would return, for she felt that her sister was quite content to let things remain as they were as long as Olga made no further protest. But others were not content with things as they were. Elizabeth was not, nor Lizette. Laura met Lizette on the street one day and learned all that the girl could tell her of Olga's trouble.

"She's so changed!" Lizette said, her eyes filling. "When we came home she was so happy, and so full of plans for Camp Fire work, and now--now she takes no interest in it at all. She won't talk about it, or hardly listen when I talk."

"I must see her," Laura said. "I'll take you home now," and when they reached the house, Lizette ran eagerly up the stairs to give Miss Laura's message.

"I've come to invite you to another tea party--with Jim and me," Laura said when Olga appeared. "You will come--to-morrow night?"

"Thank you, but I can't," the girl answered gravely.

"Why can't you, Olga? I want you very much," Laura urged.

"My sister is with me now. I cannot leave her."

"But just this once--please, Olga."

Laura's eyes--warm, loving, compelling--looked into Olga's, dark, sombre, and miserable; and suddenly with a little gasping sob the girl

yielded because she knew if she stood there another minute she would break down.

"I'll--come," she promised, and without another word turned and hurried back into the house.

Laura was half afraid that she would not keep her promise, but at six o'clock she appeared. Jim fell upon her with a gleeful welcome, and she tried to answer gaily, but the effort with which she did it was evident, and earlier than usual Laura took the boy off to bed.

"Something is troubling Olga," she whispered as she tucked him in, "and I'm going to try to find a way to help her."

"You will," he said confidently. "You're the best ever for helping folks," and he pulled her face down to give one of his rare kisses.

Laura, going back to the other room, drew the girl down beside her.

"Now, child," she said, her voice full of tenderest persuasion, "let us talk over your problems and find the way out."

For a moment the old proud reserve held the girl, but it melted under the tender sympathy in the eyes looking into hers. She drew a long breath. "It seems somehow wrong to talk about it even to you," she said. "Sonia is my sister."

"I know, dear, but sisters are not always--sisters," Laura replied, "and you are very much alone in the world. I am more truly your sister--am I not, Olga--your elder sister who loves you and wants to help?"

"O yes, yes!" the girl cried. "But I've felt I must not tell *any* one--even you--and I've crowded it all down in my heart until----"

"Until you are worn out with the strain of it all," Laura said as Olga paused. "Now tell me the whole just as if I were your sister in very fact."

And Olga told it all, from Sonia's unexpected arrival that September night to the present--of the failure of her efforts to get her sister to do some kind of work, and of Sonia's constant demands for money and clothes.

"Do you think she has really tried to get a place in a store, Olga?"

"I don't know. She says she has, but I can't feel that she really wants to do anything, or that she will ever find a place as long as I let her stay on with me. Of course I could support her, though it would not be easy, for she is hard on clothes. She doesn't take care of them and she wears them out much faster than I do. She has almost worn out my best shoes already, and my gloves, as well as my hat and suit, and she uses my handkerchiefs and--and everything, just as if they were her own. I can't earn enough to clothe her and keep myself decent." She glanced down at the old serge skirt she wore. "Miss Laura, tell me--what shall I do? Would it be right for me to leave her? The continual fret and worry of it all are wearing me out."

"I know it, dear--that is why I felt you must come and talk it all over with me."

Olga went on, "It isn't only a matter of money--and clothes, but I have *nothing* left. If I go out evenings--even across to Lizette's room--she wants to go too, or else she goes off somewhere as soon as I am out of sight, and leaves the baby shut up all alone. That's why I can't go anywhere--not even to the Camp Fire meetings. And, O Miss Laura, I was so happy when I came back from camp--I had so many lovely plans for Camp Fire work! I did mean to be a good Torch Bearer--I *did*!"

"I know you did."

"And now it's all spoilt. I can't do a single bit of Camp Fire work," she ended sadly.

"Olga," Laura's arm was around the girl's shoulders, her voice very low and tender, "you say that now you cannot do a single bit of Camp Fire work?"

Olga looked up in surprise. "How can I--when I can't be with the girls at all, nor attend the meetings?"

"Do you know what I think is the best Camp Fire service the girls have done? It is the work in their own homes. Mrs. Bicknell says that Eva is getting to be a real comfort to her. She helps with the housework and the younger children as she never used to do, and her influence is making the younger ones so much easier to manage."

"But, Miss Laura, I don't see how that is *Camp Fire* work," Olga said.

"Don't you?" Very softly Laura repeated, "'Love is the *joy of service* so deep that self is forgotten.' And isn't the home the place above all others where Camp Fire Girls should render service?"

"I--never--thought of it--that way," Olga said very slowly.

"But isn't it so?" Laura persisted. "Think now."

"Yes--of course it is so. Miss Laura, it will--it *will* make it easier to think of it as Camp Fire service, for I did so hate to be out of it all--all the Camp Fire work, I mean. I'll try to think of it that way after this. And--and I guess there isn't any way out. I suppose I ought not to long so for a way out, if I am going to be a faithful Torch Bearer." She made a brave attempt to smile.

"There is a way out--I am sure of it, but we may not find it just at once. Meantime you have a great opportunity, Olga. Don't you see? It is easy to be happy as you were in August at the camp, when you were growing stronger every day, and had just begun to realise what Camp Fire might mean to you in your service for and with the girls, and their love for you. Once you had opened your heart, you could not help being happy. But

now it is different. Now you must be happy not because of, but in spite of, circumstances. And so if you keep the law of the Camp Fire to give service--a service that it is very hard for you to give--and to be happy in spite of the trying things in your life--don't you see how much more your happiness will mean--how much deeper and stronger and finer it will be?"

"Yes, I see."

"And the girls will see too, Olga. You know how quick they are. You could not deceive them if you tried--Lena, Sadie, Louise Johnson--they will all be watching you--weighing you; and if they see that, in spite of the hard things, you are really and truly happy--that you have really found the 'joy in service so deep that *self is forgotten*'--don't you see how much stronger your influence over them will be--how immensely stronger?"

Slowly, thoughtfully, Olga nodded, her eyes on the glowing embers in the fireplace.

"So all these things that are making your life now so hard, are your great opportunity, dear," the low voice went on. "If in spite of all, you can hold high the torch of love and happiness, every girl in our Camp Fire will gladly follow her Torch Bearer."

Olga looked up, and now her eyes were shining. "*You* are the real Torch Bearer, Miss Laura!" she cried. "You have shown me the light to-night when I didn't think there was any."

"I've shown you how to keep your torch burning--that is all. Now you must hold it high to light the way for others; for you know, dear, there are others in our Camp Fire who are stumbling in dark and stony pathways, and we--you and I--must help them too, to find the lighted way."

"O, I'll try, Miss Laura, I will," Olga promised, and in her voice now there was determination as well as humility.

XIX

CLEAR SHINING AFTER DARKNESS

Sonia was an adept in thinking up remarks that carried a taunt or a sting, and she had one ready to greet her sister that night on her return; but as she looked up, she saw in Olga's face something that held back the provoking words trembling on her tongue. Instead she said, half enviously, "You look as if you'd had a fine time. What you been doing?"

"Nothing but having a firelight talk with Miss Laura. That always does me good."

"Hm!" returned Sonia. She wondered what kind of a talk it could have been to drive away the sullen gloom that had darkened her sister's face for days, and bring that strange shining look into her eyes. Sonia shrugged her shoulders. At least, Olga wouldn't hound her about finding work--not while she had that look in her eyes--and, with a mind at ease, Sonia went off to bed.

She went out the next morning, but came back in the middle of the afternoon in a gay mood. "I didn't find any place," she announced, "but I had a good dinner for once. I met--an old friend."

Something in her voice and her heightened colour awakened an indefinite suspicion in Olga's mind. "Who was it? Any one I know?" she asked.

Sonia made no reply. She had gone into the bedroom to put away her hat and jacket. When she came back she spoke of something else, but all that evening there was a curious air of repressed excitement about her.

"Oh, I forgot--the postman gave me a letter for you. It's in my bag," she exclaimed later, and bringing it from the other room, tossed it carelessly into her sister's lap.

Olga read it and handed it back. "It concerns you. O, I do hope you'll get the place," she said.

The note was from Miss Laura to say that the manager of one of the large department stores had promised to employ Sonia if she applied at once.

"Isn't that fine!" Olga cried.

"O--perhaps," Sonia returned with a chilling lack of enthusiasm.

"O Sonia, don't act so about it," Olga pleaded. "You know you must get something to do. You will go to-morrow and see the manager, won't you--after Miss Laura has taken so much trouble for you?"

"For *me*!" There was a sneer in Sonia's voice. "Much she cares for me. She did it for you--you know she did. You needn't pretend anything else."

"I don't pretend--anything," Olga said, the brightness dying out of her face.

In the morning she watched her sister with intense anxiety, but she dared not urge her further, and Sonia seemed possessed by some imp of perversity to do everything in her power to prolong Olga's suspense. She stayed in bed till the last minute, dawdled over her breakfast, insisted upon giving the baby her bath--a task which she usually left to her sister--and when at last she was ready to go out it was nearly noon.

"You'll have to give me money to get something to eat down town, Olga," she said then. "It will be noon by the time I get to that store, and I can't talk business on an empty stomach. I'd be sure to make a bad impression if I did. Half a dollar will do."

With a sigh Olga handed her the money. Sonia took it with a mocking little laugh, and was gone at last.

"O, I wonder--I *wonder* if she will really try to get the place," Olga said to herself as the door closed. She set to work then, but her restless anxiety

affected her nerves and the work did not go well. The baby too fretted and required more attention than usual. As the day wore on Olga began to worry about the baby--her small face was so pinched, and the blue shadows under her eyes were more noticeable than usual; so it was with an exclamation of relief that, opening the door in response to a knock in the late afternoon, she saw the nurse who had taken care of her in the summer.

"O, I'm so glad it's you, Miss Kennan!" she cried. "Do come in and tell me what ails this baby."

"A *baby*! Whose is it?" the nurse asked; but as she looked at the child, she forgot her question. "The poor little soul!" she exclaimed. Then with a quick sharp glance at the girl, "What have you been giving it?"

"Giving it?" Olga echoed. "Why, nothing except her food."

"What kind of food--milk?"

"Milk, and this." Olga brought a bottle of the malted food.

"That's all right. Let me see some of the milk," the nurse ordered.

She looked at the milk, smelt it, tasted it. "That seems all right too," she declared. "And you've put nothing--no medicine of any sort--in her food?"

"Why, of course not."

"Do you prepare her food always?"

"Not always. Her mother--my sister--fixes it some times."

"Ah!" said the nurse.

"What do you mean, Miss Kennan? What is the matter with the baby?"

"She's been doped," answered the nurse shortly. "Soothing syrup or something probably, to keep her quiet. Sleeps a lot, doesn't she?"

"Yes. She never seems really awake. O Miss Kennan, I never knew----"

"I see. Well, you'll have to know now. Find out what has been given her, and fix all her food after this, yourself. Can you?"

"I don't know. I'll try to."

"If you don't, she won't need food much longer," said the nurse.

"O, how can any one be so wicked!" cried Olga.

"It isn't wickedness--it's ignorance mostly--laziness sometimes, when a mother doesn't want to be troubled with the care of a baby. Probably this one had an overdose this morning."

Olga stood silently thinking. Yes, Sonia had given the baby her bottle that morning, and always gave it to her at night. She went into the bedroom and searched the closet and the bed. Sonia usually made the bed. Under the pillow Olga found a bottle which she handed without a word, to the nurse. Miss Kennan nodded.

"That's it," she said briefly.

Opening the window Olga flung the bottle passionately into the street.

"Can't you do anything to--to counteract it?" she questioned, her face as white as the child's.

"I'll bring you something," the nurse said, "and now you must stop worrying. You can't take proper care of this baby if you are in a white heat--she'll feel the mental atmosphere. I wish I could take her home with me to-night."

"You can. I wish you would. I'd feel safer about her," said Olga.

"And her mother?" the nurse questioned with a searching look.

"I won't tell her where you live. You can bring the baby back in the morning if she's better--if not, keep her till she is. I'll pay you--when I can."

"This isn't a pay-case," the nurse said in her crisp way, "it's a case of life-saving. Then I'll take her away now, before--anybody--comes to interfere."

An hour later Sonia came home. In her absorption over the baby, Olga had quite forgotten about Laura's note, and she asked no questions. That puzzled Sonia.

"What's happened?" she demanded abruptly. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I feel as if I had," Olga answered gravely.

"What do you mean, Olga?"

"The baby is sick."

"The baby?" Sonia cast a swift glance about, then hurried to the bedroom. "Where is she? What have you done with her?" she cried.

"Sonia, a nurse came here this afternoon, and she said some one had been poisoning the baby with soothing syrup."

"Poisoning her!" Sonia echoed under her breath.

"She had had an overdose," said Olga. "O Sonia, how *could* you give her that dangerous stuff?"

"How'd I know it was dangerous? An old nurse told me it was harmless," Sonia defended herself, but the colour had faded out of her face and her eyes were full of terror.

Olga told her what the nurse had said. "I asked her to take the baby home with her to-night. I knew that she would take better care of her than we could," she ended.

Sonia was too frightened to object. "I didn't know. Of course I wouldn't have given her the stuff if I had known," she said again and again, and finally to turn her thoughts to something else, Olga asked about the place.

"Yes, they took me. I am to begin Monday," Sonia answered briefly.

Neither of them slept much that night, and immediately after breakfast Olga hurried over to Miss Kennan's. The nurse met her with a smile.

"She's better--she'll pull through--and she's a darling of a baby, Olga," she said. "But you'll have to watch her closely for a while. That deadly stuff has weakened her so!"

"O, I will, I will!" Olga promised. A great love for the little creature filled her heart, as she stooped to kiss her.

For a month after this, things went better. Sonia was at the store from eight to six, and Olga in her quiet rooms, worked steadily except when the baby claimed her attention. The baby wanted more and more attention as the days went by. She no longer lay limp and half unconscious, but awoke from sleep, laughing and crowing, to stretch and roll and kick like any healthy baby. She took many precious moments of Olga's time, but Olga did not grudge them. In that one day of fear and dread, the baby had established herself once for all in the girl's heart. If things could only go on as they were--if Sonia would earn her own clothes even, and be content to stay on and leave the baby to her care, Olga felt that she could be quite happy. But she had her misgivings in regard to Sonia. There was about her at times an air of mystery and of suppressed excitement that puzzled her sister. She spent many evenings out--with friends, she said, but she never told who the friends were. Still Olga was happy. Her work, her baby (she thought of it always now as

hers), and the Camp Fire friends--these filled her days, and she put aside resolutely her misgivings in regard to her sister, worked doubly hard to pay the extra bills, and endured without complaint the discomfort of her crowded rooms where Sonia claimed and kept the most and best of everything. There was a cheery old lady in the room below--an old lady who dearly loved to get hold of a baby, and with her Olga left her little niece on Camp Fire nights, and when she went to market or to the school. The girls began to drop in again evenings, now that Sonia was so seldom there, and Olga welcomed them with shining eyes. The baby soon had all the girls at her feet. They called her "The Camp Fire Baby" and would have adopted her forthwith, but Olga would not agree to that.

"You can play with her and love her as much as you like, but she's my very own," she told them.

But with her delight in the child was always mingled a haunting fear that Sonia would some day snatch her up and disappear with her as suddenly as she had come.

It was in December that the blow fell. Sonia had not come back to supper, and Olga left the baby with old Mrs. Morris, and set off with Lizette for the Camp Fire meeting. It was a delightful meeting, and Olga enjoyed every minute of it, and the walk home with Elizabeth afterwards, while Sadie followed with Lizette.

"Come down soon and see my baby--and me," she said, as Elizabeth and Sadie turned off at their own corner, and she went on with Lizette.

Before she could knock at Mrs. Morris's door, it was opened by the old lady. "I've been watching for you----" she began, and instantly Olga read the truth in her troubled face.

"My--baby----" she gasped.

"She's gone, dearie--her mother took her away," the old lady said, her arms about the girl. "I tried to make her wait till you came, but she wouldn't."

"Gone--for good, you mean?" It was Lizette who questioned.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Morris, "she said so. She said you'd find a note upstairs. Here's your key. I'm so sorry for you, child--O, so sorry!"

Olga made no reply--she could not find words then. She went slowly up the stairs, Lizette following. Lighting the gas, she flashed a swift glance about the room. The note lay on her workbench. She snatched it up and read:

"I'm going with Dick--he came back a month ago. He says he's turned over a new leaf, and he's got a job in New York. I've always wanted to live in New York. Good-bye, Olga--be good to yourself. Baby sends bye-bye to auntie.

"Sonia."

She handed the note to Lizette, who read it with a scowl. "Well, of all the----" she began, but a glance from Olga stopped her. "Isn't there *anything* I can do?" she begged, her eyes full of tears.

"Nothing, thank you. I'll--I'll brace up as--as soon as I can, Lizette. Good-night," Olga said gently, and Lizette went away, her honest heart aching with sympathy for her friend, and Olga was alone in the place that seemed so appallingly empty because a little child had gone out of it.

But the next morning when Lizette came in Olga met her with a smile.

"I'm all right," she said. "I miss my baby every minute, but, Lizette, I mean to be happy in spite of it, and I know you'll help me. Breakfast is ready--you won't leave me to eat it alone?" Her brave smile brought a lump into Lizette's throat.

So they dropped back into their old pleasant companionship, and the girls came more often than before evenings, and Olga threw herself whole-heartedly into Camp Fire work, seeking opportunities for service. And the days slipped away and it was Christmas Eve again. Olga had spent the evening in the Camp Fire room helping to put up greens and trim the tree. She had a smile and a helping hand for every one, and Laura, watching her, said to herself, "She is holding her torch high--the dear child."

But it had not been easy--holding the torch high. On the way home the reaction came, and Olga was silent. In the merry crowd, however, only Elizabeth and Lizette noticed her silence, for Laura had sent them all home in the car, and the swift flight through the snowy streets was exciting and exhilarating. The others called gay greetings and farewells as they rolled away, leaving Olga and Lizette on the steps in the moonlight.

At Lizette's door Olga said good-night and went across to her own room. Closing the door behind her she dropped into a chair by the window, and suddenly she realised that she was very tired and O, so lonely! She longed for the pressure of a little head on her arm--for tiny fingers curling about hers--she wanted her baby.

"O, why couldn't I keep her? Sonia doesn't care for her--she doesn't! And I do. I want my baby!" she cried into the night.

But again after a little she caught back her courage. "I'm ashamed--ashamed!" she said aloud. "I'm not playing fair. I've got to be happy if I can't have my baby, and I will. But, O, if I were only sure that she is cared for!"

At that moment there came a low rap on her door. Going to it, she called, "Who is it? Who is there?" but she did not open the door.

There was no reply, only the sound of soft retreating footsteps.

"Somebody going by," she said, turning away, but as she did so she thought she heard a little whimpering cry outside. Instantly she flung the door open, and there in a basket lay her baby.

"It--it *can't* be!" Olga cried out, incredulous. Then she caught up the baby and hugged her till the little thing whimpered again, half afraid. "O, it is--it *is*!" Olga cried. "You blessed darling--if I could only keep you forever!" Still holding the child close, she snatched up the basket, shut the door, and lit the gas. In the basket she found a note from her sister.

"I'm sending back the baby [it read]; I only took her to scare you--just to pay you off for nagging me so about work. You can have her now for keeps. Dick doesn't care for children and they are an awful bother, and you've spoiled this one anyhow, fussing so over her. I reckon you and I aren't exactly congenial, and I shan't trouble you any more unless Dick goes back on me again, and I don't think he will.

"Sonia."

Through the still night air came the sound of bells--Christmas bells ringing in the Great Day. To Olga they seemed to call softly:

"'Love is the joy of service so deep that self is forgotten.'"