

FICTION

Laura Lee Hope

The Outdoor Girls in a Winter Camp

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FICTION

The Outdoor Girls In a Winter Camp

OR

**GLORIOUS DAYS ON SKATES
AND ICE BOATS**

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE OUTDOOR GIRLS OF DEEPPDALE," "THE
OUTDOOR GIRLS AT RAINBOW LAKE," "THE
BOBBSEY TWINS," "THE BOBBSEY TWINS
AT THE SEASHORE," ETC.

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By **LAURA LEE HOPE**



THE OUTDOOR GIRLS SERIES

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THE OUTDOOR GIRLS AT RAINBOW LAKE
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A MOTOR CAR
THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP
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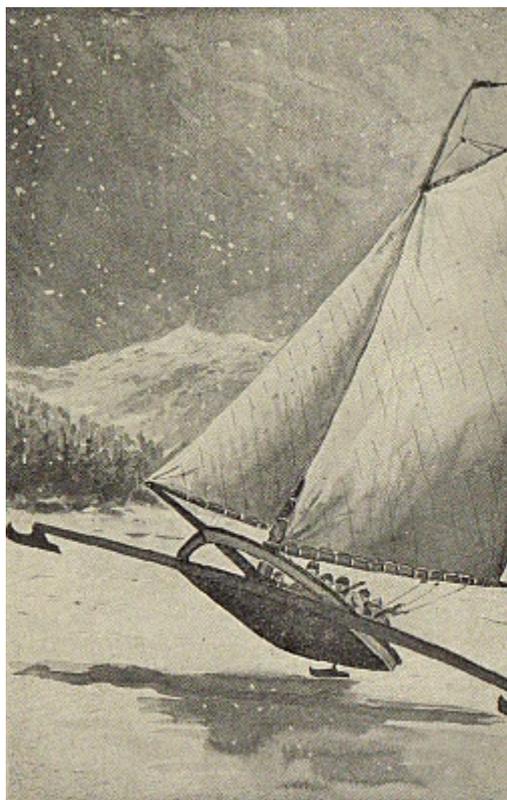
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THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP



**"SLOW DOWN--DON'T RUN INTO
ANYTHING!" BEGGED BETTY.**

The Outdoor Girls in a Winter Camp. Frontispiece ([Page 106.](#))

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THE OUTDOOR GIRLS IN A WINTER CAMP

CHAPTER I

DANGER

"How cold it is!" exclaimed Grace Ford, wrapping closer about her a fur neck-piece, and plunging her gloved hands deeper into the pockets of her maroon sweater. "I had no idea it was so chilling!"

"Nonsense!" cried Betty Nelson, her cheeks aglow. "Skate about, and you'll soon be warm enough. Isn't it glorious, Mollie?"

"Surely, and the ice is perfect. Come on Grace, and we'll see who'll be first to the bend!" and Mollie, her dark eyes dancing under the spell of the day, circled about the almost shivering Grace, doing a gliding waltz on skates.

"I don't want to race!" protested the tall, slim girl who had complained about the weather.

"Oh, but you must!" insisted Betty. "Come, we'll have a short, sharp one, and then you'll feel so warm you'll wonder you ever said it was chilly."

"I wish I had brought along that vacuum bottle of hot chocolate, as I intended," murmured Grace, reflectively.

"Nobody stopped you!" exclaimed Mollie, a trifle sharply. Of late she had had less and less patience with the "confectionery-failing" of Grace, as she termed it.

"Yes, you did!" declared the cold one. "You and Bet were in such a rush I didn't have time. I wish I hadn't come skating," and Grace permitted as much of a frown to gather on her pretty face as she ever indulged herself in--for Grace, be it known, was just a trifle vain, and desperately afraid of a wrinkle.

"Oh, well, come on and skate!" invited Betty. "Amy and I will race you and Mollie, Grace. That will--make us all feel better," for the Little Captain, as she was often called, saw just the shadow of a cloud gathering over the two chums, who seldom, or never, quarreled.

"Does Amy want to?" asked Grace, glancing at a quiet girl who was adjusting her skates. Amy was always quiet, but of late her chums had noted that she was more than usually so. And they guessed, rightly, that it had to do with the mystery surrounding her identity, which mystery Amy had almost given up hope of solving.

"Yes, I'll race," said Amy gently, and she smiled. Amy was always willing to oblige, and she did not often consult her own personal feelings.

Something like a look of disappointment passed over the countenance of Grace. Seeing it Mollie laughed.

"Grace was hoping Amy would say no, so she could get out of it!" cried vivacious Mollie. "That's the time you didn't say the right thing, Amy."

"Oh, well, if nothing but a race will satisfy you, I suppose I must," and Grace gave in "gracefully." "I'm nearly perished standing still, anyhow, and skating can't make me much worse."

"It will be all the better," insisted Betty. "Now we'll race in this fashion--team work to count. Amy and I in one team, you and Grace in the other, Mollie. Whichever member of the team gets to the bend first will win. You see," Betty explained, "one of a team might fall, or turn her ankle, or get tired, and then the other could keep on. It's like a relay race."

"Oh, well, if I have to--I suppose I have to," and Grace said this with such a doleful sigh that the others laughed heartily, even quiet Amy joining.

"On your marks!" cried Betty. "Let's show that we are worthy of our names--true Outdoor Girls."

"Show who?" asked Grace looking around.

"Well, here comes your brother Will, for one, and I think Allen Washburn and Frank Haley are with him," spoke Betty, shading her eyes with her hands, and gazing off across the sparkling surface of the frozen Argono River.

"Can't you see Percy Falconer?" asked Mollie mischievously, referring to a certain foppish lad, who seemed to have a great fondness for the Little Captain.

"If there was any snow here I'd wash your face!" cried Betty, her cheeks flaming more than before--for, be it known, she did not reciprocate the feeling that "burned in Percy's manly bosom," to quote the rather jeering remarks of Grace.

"I'd rather Allen would do it," murmured Mollie. "That is, if you will let him, Betty."

"Let him? Why shouldn't I?" demanded Betty rather sharply, but she turned her head away, and bit her lips.

"Oh, nothing, only the other night, when you and he went on such a long walk down the road, I thought perhaps you might have come to some understanding----"

"Mollie Billette, if you don't stop----!" began Betty, and then the approach of three young men on their ringing skates forced her to conclude rather quickly.

"Hello, girls," greeted Will Ford, the brother of the willowy Grace, "what's doing?" Will was just the opposite of his sister, being rather short and chunky.

"We're going to have a race," said Betty quickly, perhaps to forestall any resumption of the embarrassing conversation, now that the subject of it was present.

"A race!" exclaimed Allen, a rising young lawyer. "May we join in?"

"This is strictly a ladies' relay race," explained Mollie. "You may be judges, or starters and offer the prizes, though, if you like."

"And the prizes----?" suggested Frank, who was Will's special chum.

"Hot chocolates when we go back to town," said Betty quickly. "I know Grace will agree."

"Indeed I will," the latter said. "I don't care how much fun you make of me, but I am cold, and--and----"

"Us 'ikes tandy--don't us!" interrupted Will, mimicking the little twin brother and sister of Mollie, whose penchant for sweets was only equalled by the longing of Grace.

"Easy," said Betty softly. "Well, if we're going to race, let's do it. Boys, you see fair play. It's to be down to the bend and back."

"No, not back!" declared Amy. "I can't do as much as that at top speed."

"Well, then, just to the bend," agreed Betty, indicating a spot where the river made a turn, about a mile away.

"We'll skate along," suggested Allen. "It is a bit chilly, and the exercise will be good for us. Get ready girls. I'm sorry we haven't a pistol to fire."

"This will do!" exclaimed Will, producing a paper bag. "It *had* chocolates in," he added with a sly look at his sister.

"Oh!" she cried.

"Nothing doing!" he added quickly if slangily. "Nothing but crumbs," and he proceeded to empty them into his mouth, and then blew up the bag. "When I burst it--go!" he called.

The sharp report of the exploding bag echoed on the keen, wintry air, and the four girls glided off on their skates. Mollie and Betty, the two best skaters, rather hung back, letting the more unskillful Amy and Grace lead the way. The boys skated together in the rear.

"When are you going to spurt?" called Will, as he saw that the pace was not increasing much.

"Time enough," replied Betty, narrowly watching her rival, Mollie.

"That isn't skating!" declared Frank with a laugh. "You girls are only creeping."

But at that instant Grace, at a signal from Mollie, darted ahead, and then the race began in earnest, for Amy, at a nod from the Little Captain did likewise, and then Mollie and Betty, holding themselves in readiness for the burst of speed that would take place at the finish, came after.

"Now they're off!" cried Will. "A pound of chocolates to the winner!"

Three-quarters of the way to the bend Amy showed signs of fatigue. Betty, noting it, called to her:

"I'll take it now."

"So will I!" agreed Mollie, and Grace, gliding to one side, allowed her partner to take the lead.

"Now they're off!" cried Will again.

"Thank goodness, I'm warm, anyhow!" remarked Grace, a rosy glow replacing the former paleness of her cheeks.

Leaving Amy and Grace to follow on more leisurely, the youths rushed up to see the finish of the race. It was close, but by unanimous decision they awarded the contest to Betty.

"Oh, I'm so glad you won, anyhow!" declared Mollie with fine spirit. "You earned it, Betty dear, but I thought I was going to beat you, until the very end."

"Yes, and you might have, only your left skate was loose," said Betty. "I noticed it. Suppose we try it over?"

"Indeed not! My skate did loosen," spoke Mollie, "but I wasn't going to say anything about it. You won fairly Betty, and I'm too exhausted to try again. Now if the boys will----"

"Oh, we'll fulfill our part of the program!" declared Will promptly. "Come on back to the village whenever you like, and order what you wish. Or we can go on to the store of the poetical Mr. Lagg if you prefer."

"It's too far," protested Grace, who, with Amy, had come up now. "Besides he doesn't serve hot chocolate."

"Then thou shalt have thy hot chocolate, sister mine!" cried Will, rubbing her ears.

"Oh, stop it!" she begged. "You hurt dreadfully, Will!"

"That's the way to make them warm," and he got back out of the way in time to avoid having his own ears soundly boxed.

Slowly the young people skated back. There were a number of others on the ice now, and soon our friends were in the midst of quite a throng.

"Here come Alice Jallow and Kittie Rossmore," murmured Mollie. "I hope they don't tag along after us."

"They're likely to," said Grace. "Though since that last little trouble they haven't been as unpleasant as they used to be."

The boys circled away from Betty and her chums momentarily, and the two girls referred to came skating past. They bowed rather coldly, and then, an acquaintance of theirs joining them, they stopped to chat with the latter. Mollie's skate again becoming loosened, she halted to adjust it, her friends waiting for her. It was thus that they overheard what Alice Jallow was saying to Margaret Black, the girl who had just come up.

"Yes," Alice spoke, "she gives herself as many airs as if she was somebody, instead of a nobody."

"A nobody?" repeated Margaret, wonderingly, "why----"

"Yes, indeed! She isn't even sure her name is Stonington, and as for Mr. and Mrs. Stonington being her uncle and aunt as she says, why, I heard the other day that there is doubt of that even. She and her chums think themselves high and mighty, but we wouldn't go with anybody that didn't know who they were!"

"But I thought there was something about a flood in the West----"

"Oh, yes, that's the story she gave out, but I, for one don't believe it. She's a nobody, and that's all there is to it!"

Then Alice, leaving her bitter words echoing on the wintry air, which carried them clearly to poor Amy, skated off. Perhaps Alice had not meant that she should be overheard, but such was the case. She did not take the trouble to look and see if the one to whom she referred was within hearing distance.

At the first intimation of what was coming Betty had started off, as did the other girls. Mollie seemed to have a notion of rushing over to Alice and the others, but Grace, by a gesture, warned her not to.

Poor Amy's eyes filled with tears. She turned aside and Betty made as though to skate after her, intending to offer words of sympathy, but this time Mollie shook her head.

"Perhaps she had better be alone for a little while," she whispered. "Sometimes that is the best way to pass it off. Oh, but that Alice Jallow is a--cat!"

No one disagreed with Mollie this time.

Tears blinded the eyes of poor Amy. She skated on out of the crowd, toward a part of the frozen river where there were no merry-makers. She did not want to look on pleasure now, for her heart ached from the bitter words she had overheard--words, she realized, that might be but too true.

Blindly she skated on, not heeding, and scarcely caring where she went. Her only desire was to get away where she could be by herself, to think it out--to try and devise a way of setting at rest all the rumors about her. For the rumors had grown apace of late, and from a source she could not determine. It might be that what she had just heard was a clue.

Amy had thought of appealing to Mr. and Mrs. Stonington, with whom she lived, and who, for many years she had regarded as father and mother. Then, a few months back, she had learned that they were but uncle and aunt. Now it seemed that she was to lose even this relationship. It was a bitter blow, especially to one so young in years.

To briefly mention the mystery of Amy, I might say that she was picked up when an infant, afloat on a raft in a flood in a western city. Pinned to her baby dress was an envelope containing the name of Mr. Stonington of Deepdale. He had been telegraphed for, and took charge of the infant.

It was supposed that the mother of the baby was a distant relative of Mrs. Stonington, for the latter had a cousin who resided in the western city. It was believed that, finding herself about to perish, the mother did what she could to insure the salvation of her child, and pinned a note to her dress so that relatives would look after her if the baby was saved.

But only the envelope was found, together with an old and torn diary that gave no tangible clue.

And this was the mystery of Amy's life. As I have said, after living for years in the belief that Mr. and Mrs. Stonington were her parents, they had told her the truth. Now it seemed that there was to be another change.

"Oh, but why must it be so?" mourned poor Amy. "Why can't I be like other girls?"

The tears rushed to her eyes. She could not see, and she skated rapidly on, only wanting to get away.

She heard the ringing of steel runners behind her, but would not turn. Then a voice--a boy's voice--called:

"Look out! Look out where you're going, Amy! The ice is thin up there, and you're going right toward an air-hole! There's danger! Look out!"

If Amy heard she gave no sign nor heed. On she skated, and then the voice behind her called in startled tones:

"What do you mean? Amy, turn! Turn back before it is too late! You'll be drowned!"

The skater behind fairly rushed forward, for he had seen what the tear-blinded girl had not--black water showing through a hole in the ice. And Amy was headed directly for this opening.



CHAPTER II

A FINE CHANCE

"That Alice Jallow is certainly the meanest girl in Deepdale!" declared Mollie, with vehemence.

"And Kittie isn't much better," added Grace, with spirit. "I don't see how Margaret can go with them."

"She's a newcomer here, that's the reason," said Betty--bouncing Betty she was now, for she was whirling about and "teetering" on her skates in a dizzying fashion. "When she gets to know those girls she won't have any more to do with them than--we do."

"And there was a time, even after they made those first slurring remarks about Amy, that they seemed real nice," spoke Grace.

"It was too good to last," asserted Mollie. "Oh--the cat!"

Mollie shot out the word as though she would like to exercise some of the proclivities of a feline herself, and scratch.

"What possessed her to stop where she did, and talk loud enough for Amy to hear?" asked Grace.

"It's hard to tell," decided Betty with a sigh. "Shall we go after her?" and she nodded in the direction taken by Amy, who could not now be seen because of the intervening crowds.

"No; best let her cry it out, poor child," said Mollie, softly. "She was crying when she skated away."

"Well, if we can find the boys we'll just mildly hint that those chocolates are about due," observed Grace, and she and the others looked about for Will and his chums, little dreaming of the danger which, at that moment, menaced poor Amy.

Those of you who have read the previous books of this series need no special introduction to my heroines. Others may care for just a brief one. The initial volume, entitled "The Outdoor Girls of Deepdale; Or, Camping and Tramping for Fun and Health," told how Betty, Mollie, Grace and Amy decided to go on a walking tour. Incidentally they solved the mystery of a five hundred dollar bill, and won the lasting gratitude of a Mr. Henry Blackford, a young business man.

In the second book, "The Outdoor Girls at Rainbow Lake; Or, The Stirring Cruise of the Motor Boat *Gem*," there was a queer ghostly mystery on an island, but the girls were a match for it. As may be guessed from the title, the story has to do with boating, Betty having become the proud possessor of a fine craft.

When Mollie Billette got her touring car the girls saw no end of good times ahead of them, and their hopes were fully realized. The third volume, named "The Outdoor Girls in a Motor Car; Or, The Haunted Mansion of Shadow Valley," involved the girls from the very start in a series of queer happenings. They could not discover, until the very end, why a certain girl fell out of a tree. And as for the strange manifestations in the mysterious old mansion--but there, it would not be fair to betray the secret in such a fashion.

The beautiful Fall weather gave the girls a chance to make long tours in the car, and they enjoyed every minute spent in the open. And now they were on the edge of winter.

A cold snap had frozen over the Argono River, on the pleasant banks of which was located Deepdale, the thriving town where our friends lived. And they were out enjoying the sport when Amy overheard the cruel words that sent her off crying.

I might add something about the personal lives of the four chums, by saying that Betty was an only child, that Grace had a lovable brother Will, and Mollie a small brother and sister--Paul and Dodo--twins, who were alternately called the "cutest" and the "most mischievous" youngsters in existence. Of Amy's mystery I have already hinted.

When Will Ford saw the danger in which his sister's chum was unconsciously placing herself he fairly raced forward. There was need to act promptly, and Will did so. Skating in a diagonal direction he fairly collided with the girl, and forced her out of her course, and away from the dangerous hole that yawned there just before her.

"Amy!" Will cried. "What is the matter?"

Amy looked up with a start, and Will saw that she had been crying.

"I--I don't know," she stammered. "I guess I wasn't looking where I was going."

"I should say not!" cried Will. "Look there!" and he pointed to the open water that seemed so black and ugly in contrast with the pure ice.

"Oh--oh!" she gasped. "Was--was I skating toward that?"

"Right toward it!" exclaimed Will. "I couldn't do anything else than shove you to one side. I hope I didn't hurt you."

"Oh, no, Will, it was good of you. I--I didn't know what I was doing. I was thinking--thinking----"

She hesitated, and again tears came into her eyes.

"Can I do anything for you--has anything happened?" he asked, eagerly. "Has anyone----"

"Oh, no, Will. It is--nothing."

"Then let's go back to the others," he proposed. "They may be getting anxious about you."

"No, Will, I'd rather not go back--just now. I'll go on--home." Amy hesitated over the word. "I can take a short cut across the fields."

"Then let me take off your skates," he said, gently. Perhaps he guessed at something that had occurred. "Come over to shore and I'll have them off in a jiffy. Then I'll walk home with you."

"No, Will," said Amy, in a low voice. "I had rather go alone, really I would. Just tell the girls----"

She hesitated again, and seemed unable to speak.

"Tell them I am all right--that I want to be alone. They will understand."

"Very well." He skated with her to the bank, where she sat on a log. Then, with her skates dangling over her shoulder, Amy set off across the snow-covered fields alone--with bowed head--and into her eyes the tears came again as she thought of what she had heard.

Will watched her, shook his head once or twice, as though puzzled, and then skated back toward his sister and the others.

"Where's Amy?" Grace demanded, anxiously, as he came in sight.

"Gone home."

"Home? Why didn't you go with her?" asked Mollie, quickly.

"She wouldn't let me. Say, she acted mighty funny. She was skating along, looking down, and she came within a few feet of going into an air hole. I had to almost knock her to one side. She seemed dazed. Did anything happen?"

"Yes, there did," said Grace, promptly. "And the less said about it the better. It was that horrid Alice Jallow making slurring remarks about Amy. We won't take any notice of her after this. Oh, how mean she is!" Briefly, she told Will what had happened.

"That accounts for it," he said. "Poor Amy! No wonder she didn't look where she was going. She might have been drowned."

"Don't say that!" cried Betty, sharply.

"Why not, when it's the truth?"

Betty gave the woman's reason.

"Because."

Frank and Allen came skating up.

"Come!" cried Grace, as joyfully as possible under the circumstances. "The prizes--our chocolates, boys!"

"Of course!" added Allen. "But where is Amy?"

"She'll be along later--maybe," and Will winked at his chum as a signal not to be too inquisitive. The young lawyer understood and nodded.

Soon the party of young people were in a drug store, partaking of hot chocolates, and talking of the fun on the ice, while Grace spent some time at the candy counter, selecting a new variety of chocolates.

That evening Betty and Mollie called on Grace.

"Let's go over and cheer Amy up," proposed Betty, who was always thinking of some kindness.

"All right," agreed Grace. "Come into the library a moment. I'll get you that book I promised, Betty. Oh, it's just splendid! You won't stop until you finish it."

"Good!"

"Oh, Papa, I didn't know you were here!" exclaimed Grace, as, leading her chums into the library, she discovered her father busy over a mass of papers on the table.

"That's all right," he invited. "Come right in. It's only a little legal tangle I'm trying to straighten out," for Mr. Ford was a well-known lawyer.

"Anything we can help you with?" asked Betty, with a smile.

"I'm afraid not," he answered, laughing. "I've just been appointed receiver of a bankrupt lumber camp up in the North Woods, and I've got to arrange for some one to stay there during the winter to see that it isn't disturbed. It comes just at the wrong time, too. I'm so busy I don't know how I can spare the time to go up there and straighten things out. Where are you going, Grace?"

"Over to see poor Amy Stonington. It's too bad! She heard something more about her mystery to-day, Daddy, and she nearly skated into an airhole--she was so upset. Isn't it horrid?"

"Yes, it is too bad about Amy," said Mr. Ford, for he knew the story, as did many in Deepdale. "She ought to get out and away from the influences around here. Stonington ought to take her away."

He was musing for a moment. Then a queer expression came over his face.

"Girls!" he cried. "I think I have something that will just fill the bill!"

"Oh, Papa!" cried Grace, clapping her hands. "When you talk that way I know something is going to happen!"

"Well, we'll see," he answered. "As I understand it, the High School won't open until late this winter, on account of the repairs not being finished."

"That's right, Daddy!" cried Grace. "Not until after Christmas. Go on!"

"Well, about this lumber camp that I've got to get someone to take charge of. It seems that there are some bungalows or cabins in it that can be hired out to campers. Now if----"

"Daddy, I've guessed it!" cried Grace, jumping up and putting her arms about his neck. "You're going to let us go up there to a winter camp. Aren't you?"

"I was thinking of it," he confessed. "It seems to me to be a fine chance for you to get all the fresh air you want. And I suggest that you take Amy along. What she needs is a change of environment. She has had too much of Deepdale of late. Could you take her with you?"

"Of course, Daddy!" cried Grace. "Oh, what a lovely opportunity! We could get Cousin Jane to go with us, perhaps," and she looked at Mollie, whose cousin had chaperoned them on the auto tour.

"Yes, she could," said Mr. Ford, slowly. "And I was thinking of an old lumberman and his wife whom I might appoint as care-takers of the camp. They could help look after you."

"As if we needed looking after!" challenged Grace.

"Well, we'll think about it," he said. "If you girls want to go to a winter camp, I see no reason why you could not. Of course there are complications, but perhaps we can get over those."

"Complications!" cried Grace. "Girls, we'll not stir another step until we hear all about those complications! It sounds very interesting."

"It surely does," agreed Betty and Mollie.

CHAPTER III

THE COMPLICATIONS

"Before I begin," said Mr. Ford, as he glanced over the papers that littered the table, "let me ask, has anything new come up about your friend Amy? Is she any nearer solving the mystery of her identity?"

"No," replied Betty.

"Then what occurred to-day?"

"Oh, it was that horrid Alice Jallow!" exclaimed Mollie. "Excuse me, Mr. Ford!" she cried, impulsively, "but I just can't help saying it."

"You are excused," he said, smiling.

By turns the girls told what had happened on the ice.

"Humph! Rather strange," mused the lawyer. "Quite a coincidence. I don't believe I ever told you, Grace," and he looked at his daughter, "but, as a matter of fact, I am the principal owner of this lumber camp where you girls may go."

"No, you never told me, Daddy."

"Well, I am. I bought it some time ago as an investment, but things went wrong. I guess the right men didn't have charge. Neither the lumber business, nor the leasing of camp sites and bungalows to Summer vacationists and Fall hunters, paid. The matter got into the courts and I had myself named as receiver, so I could better look after my interest. Now I don't know just what I am going to do, except that I want some one up there to see to things. If I can get Ted Franklin and his wife I know it will be all right, and you girls will have a fine time with them.

"You can have a bungalow or a cabin or two to yourselves, if you like, and lay in enough provisions for all winter. It's on a branch of the Argono River," he went on, "and you can skate all the way to camp on the ice, if you like. But we'll discuss the details later."

"What about the complications, Daddy?" asked Grace, laughing.

"I'm coming to them. Mr. Jallow, the father of your friend Alice----"

"She isn't our friend," said Grace, quickly.

"Well, anyhow, her father is mixed up in this lumber camp business. He owns a lot of property next to mine, and he claims some that I think should belong to me."

"He does?" cried Mollie. "That's just like the Jallows! Always taking what doesn't belong to them--even the reputation of other girls. She borrowed my botany a year ago and never returned it."

Mr. Ford smiled.

"I don't know anything about the girl Alice," he said, "but that Jallow is certainly a sharper, to be moderate. He and I will have a clash if he doesn't look out!" and Mr. Ford's hands clenched.

"What about, Daddy?" asked Grace.

"Why, as I said, he claims some land that I think is mine. When I bought this lumber camp, and formed a company, with myself as the largest stockholder, I was given to understand that a certain tract, containing valuable timber, went with my purchase. I had it surveyed, and I supposed I had title to this big strip, that joins on some land Jallow owns.

"We didn't cut any trees on this strip for some years, and here this Fall, when we started in on it, Jallow stopped us by an injunction from the court."

"By what right?" asked Betty.

"Why, he claimed that valuable strip was his. I contested, of course, but it seems that there was a mix-up in the landmarks. Those by which I went, when I had my survey made, had disappeared, and others which were accepted by the court seemed to indicate that the land was Jallow's. But I know better. I was there at the survey, and saw the marks. The trouble is that I couldn't prove it. My word alone was not enough, and the surveyor, I am sorry to say, is dead."

"Then you can never prove it is your land, Daddy?"

"Well, if I could find an old lumberman--Paddy Malone he called himself--if I could find him, I might prove my case, for he was with me at the time, he and a couple of his friends, and he saw where the stakes and stone piles were. But Paddy seems to have disappeared."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Mollie, sympathetically.

"Yes. Well, I may be able to do something later. I am sure the landmarks were changed--if not by Jallow, by some one interested with him. The strip they claim, and which I say is mine, is the most valuable in the woods. I wish I could establish title to it, but unless I can find Paddy, or some of his friends, I'm afraid I'll have to lose.

"That is the complication I spoke of. But it need not hinder you girls from going to spend the winter in camp--or at least part of the winter."

"Will there be any danger?" asked Grace, rather timidly.

"No, not at all. You won't be mixed up in the legal proceedings. Nothing will be done, anyhow, until Spring. Then I'll see what can be accomplished. I only want a legal representative in the camp, in case Jallow tries any more sharp tricks. He has won the first skirmish, however, so I don't believe he'll make another move until I do. It only complicates matters, though.

"Now, if you girls think you'd like to go winter camping, why, say the word, find out if your folks will let you," and Mr. Ford looked at Mollie and Betty, "and I'll arrange with Ted Franklin and his wife."

"Of course we'll go, Daddy!" cried Grace, dancing about the room. "It will be just lovely; won't it, girls?"

"Scrumptious!" agreed Mollie.

"I'm sure I can go!" declared Betty. "Now let's go tell poor Amy!"

"Yes, I think the change will do her good," said Mr. Ford, reflectively. "Those Jallows--well, perhaps the least said about them the better."

Talking excitedly over the chance that had been offered to them, Grace, Mollie and Betty were soon on their way to the home of Amy Stonington. They found their chum in better spirits. The gloom of the day had passed, and she smiled, though wanly.

By common, though unspoken, consent, the little episode of the afternoon was not referred to.

"But, oh! we've got the finest news!" cried Betty, enthusiastically. "We're going winter camping! Think of that! Winter camping!"

"Tell me about it!" commanded Amy, her face brightening. And they told her.

The description had been nearly finished, and from Mr. and Mrs. Stonington had been exacted a tentative promise that Amy could go if the rest did, when the telephone bell rang.

"It's Will on the wire," said Amy to Grace. "He wants to speak to you."

"How did he know I was here?" asked Grace, as she took the receiver from her chum. "Oh, papa must have told him. Yes, what is it, Will? What! Mr. Blackford there? And he has some strange news of his missing sister? Yes, you and he can come right over!"

She turned and gazed with startled eyes at her chums.

"I--I wonder if he has found her?" faltered Mollie.

CHAPTER IV

MR. BLACKFORD'S CLUE

"Hope I didn't disturb any family party," apologized Mr. Blackford, when he and Will called at the Stonington home a little later that evening.

"Not at all," greeted Amy. "Come in. We are planning another season of activity."

"I might have guessed," answered the young man who had been so peculiarly involved in the five hundred dollar bill mystery. "You Outdoor Girls are always doing something novel. What is it this time?"

"A winter camp!" they cried in chorus.

"List to the pretty maidens!" sung Will, mockingly, as he assumed a theatrical attitude.

"Behave!" ordered his sister, whereat Will proceeded to contort himself in various ways to the great amusement of the girls.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Mr. Blackford--"fine that you can go camping, I mean--not Will's circus act. But I must apologize for coming in on you this way. I happened to have some business in town, and as I received a curious bit of news I thought you girls might be interested. It's about my missing sister," he added, simply. "I've told you how I have been searching for her.

"Perhaps I shouldn't bother you with my family troubles," he continued, hesitatingly, "but, somehow, ever since you helped me out so in the matter of that five hundred dollars, I have felt as though you did really take an interest in me, as I do in you. And, as I haven't any real folks of my own--so far," and he smiled, "naturally I come to you. Shall I go on?"

The girls nodded. After making the acquaintance of the young man in the manner related in our first volume, they had learned the queer fact of Mr. Blackford having a sister of whom he had lost track. At one time he hoped it might develop that she was the strange girl who fell out of the tree, but it was not so. This girl, Carrie Norton, had, after spending some time in Deepdale, departed to live with a distant relative.

Mr. Blackford had engaged a firm which made a specialty of locating missing persons to look for his sister, but so far there had been no result.

"And it doesn't look as though this were going to be very promising," the young man went on. "You know this searching firm has been delving among my wood-pile relations, as I call them, looking for clues," he went on. "They are getting all the old documents, bits of family history, descriptions, and so on, that they can lay hands on. It all helps, in a way, but we haven't had much luck so far. But you may be interested in something that just came up, and you may be able to help me.

"I've been traveling about, in connection with my business, and as I knew I would 'make' this town to-night, I had all my mail sent here. Imagine my surprise when I got to my hotel, a little while ago, to find the most promising clue yet."

"What is it?" asked Betty, eagerly.

"I thought you might be interested," said the young man, "and that is why I called at your house," and he nodded to Will.

"You had gone out," remarked Will to Grace, "so I asked dad where, as the maid said you'd all been in the library. Then I called up here," and he nodded to Amy.

"Glad you did," she returned. She seemed to have forgotten the trouble of the afternoon.

"Well," went on Mr. Blackford, "I feared it was a sort of imposition to come, and----"

"I told him it wasn't at all," interrupted Will.

"So on I came," proceeded the young business man.

"But what is the clue?" asked Grace, interestedly.

"This," was the reply, as he took some papers from his pocket. "But it's a clue that----"

"Isn't a clue," put in Will.

"Because----"

"It breaks off in the middle."

"Oh, Will, let him tell it; can't you?" demanded Grace, impatiently. "We don't know whom we're listening to."

"Well, to be brief," said Mr. Blackford, "the firm I have engaged, the other day, wrote me that they were on the track of my sister. They felt sure they were going to find her, and I was very hopeful.

"It seems that they had found some old documents in the attic of a house where some distant relatives live. They wrote me they were sending them on, and--here they are!"

He brought out a bundle of time-stained and yellow papers, and spread them on the table.

"Gracious!" cried Will. "Your sister must be quite elderly to have such ancient documents refer to her."

"No," said Mr. Blackford, "she is younger than I am, I believe. But I have no certain knowledge of that. Anyhow, this is part of a letter written about the girl whom I have every reason to believe is my sister. And the part that is most interesting----"

"Is where----" began Will.

"Can't you keep still?" begged his sister.

"Has 'oo dot any tandy?" and he imitated little Dodo.

"Oh, take that!" and Grace passed him a caramel. "Now, let's hear what it is, Mr. Blackford."

"There is a part of the letter which says this," went on Mr. Blackford, and he proceeded to read:

"You can always identify the girl because she has a most peculiar birth-mark on----"

He ceased reading.

"Well, go on, please," requested Betty. "This is getting interesting."

"It isn't *getting* interesting--it's so already," declared Mollie. "Go on, please, Mr. Blackford, tell us what sort of birth-mark your sister has."

"That's just the trouble," he remarked, ruefully. "I can't do it."

"Why not?" Betty wanted to know.

"Because, just at that point--where the description of the birth-mark, and its location, should appear--the letter is torn. A corner is gone. I have no more idea of what sort of identifying mark my sister has, than have you. It is worse than before, for I saw hope ahead of me, only to see it disappear now.

"I feel sure that the girl referred to in the old letter is my sister; but how can I identify her, in case I meet her, until I know what sort of a mark she has, and where it is?"

"You can't!" declared Will, positively.

"And that makes it all the more tantalizing," went on Mr. Blackford. "They even--that firm I spoke of--they even had located the part of the country where it might be possible my sister was, and now to have it fail this way----"

"Where did they say she might be?" asked Amy.

"Somewhere up in Canada. But it is rather vague. If only that piece was not torn off the edge of the letter!"

"Can't you find it somewhere?" asked Mollie. "Maybe in forwarding it the people you hired tore it by accident."

"I thought of that, so I telephoned as soon as I got this letter, asking where the missing piece was. I got word back that they knew nothing about it."

There was silence for a moment, while they all looked at the mutilated document Mr. Blackford held up. It showed a tear across one corner, a tear that disposed of the most vital piece of information contained on the whole paper.

"That's too bad," spoke Amy, sympathetically.

"Yes," agreed Mollie, as she put back a stray and rebellious lock of hair, "it spoils all your plans, I suppose, Mr. Blackford."

"In a way, yes. But I'm not going to give up. I'm going to find out where they got this document from, and go there. It may have been in some old attic trunk, among some--love letters--and the missing piece may be there."

"Without it you're all at sea," declared Will. "You don't know what sort of a mark to look for, nor where it might be."

"And he can't very well go around asking all the girls he meets if they have peculiar birth-marks," commented Mollie.

"Well, I hardly know why I told you my troubles," said the young man, "but----"

"Why shouldn't you?" asked Betty, pleasantly. "We are interested in you, of course, ever since----"

"That five hundred dollar bill you thought was gone for good," added Amy. "But if we hear of anything----" and she paused suggestively.

"I wish you'd let me know!" exclaimed Mr. Blackford. "I know you girls are very lucky. You've proved it several times. Now if you happen to hear of anyone who would fit what description I have of my sister--and it isn't much, to tell the truth--or if you think you see anyone who resembles me, or who has a peculiar birth-mark, just let me know. You travel around so much, and you meet so many strange people----"

"We do seem to," agreed Grace.

"Well, just let me know," finished Mr. Blackford.

For some little time they talked of the curious happening, and the perversity of fate that should provide for such a vital piece of the letter being missing. Then, after Amy had provided refreshments, the young men and girls prepared to take their leave.

"And you and Mollie won't forget to find out for sure if you can go to the lumber camp; will you, Betty?" asked Grace. "Let me know as soon as you can."

"I'll call you up first thing in the morning," promised Betty. "I'm pretty sure I can go. Oh! what fun we'll have!"

"Any skating there?" asked Mr. Blackford.

"Oceans of it!" said Grace, who had asked her father many questions about the camp they expected to visit.

"How about ice boating?" inquired Will.

"You can have that, too. There isn't an ice boat in camp, father said, but not far away a man has a sort of winter bungalow, and he keeps a number. Maybe he'll lend us one."

"And can you run it?" asked Amy, timidly.

"It runs itself--you just sit in it and the wind blows it along. All you have to do is steer," said Grace.

"You're getting to be quite an authority," declared Mollie. "Oh, but I know we'll have a fine time!"

"And we'll come up too, sometimes," put in Will. "That is, if you girls will let us."

"Of course," murmured Mollie. "Isn't that the telephone ringing, Grace?" for they were all on the front steps.

"Yes. I'll see who it is," said Amy. "Maybe they want one of you girls. Wait!"

"Can't have any of 'em--all taken," declared Will.

"It's you they want, Mollie," reported Amy, coming back. "It's your mother, and she seems to be in trouble."

"Trouble?" Mollie's voice trembled.

"Yes. Oh, dear! I'm sure she was crying!" and Amy's voice faltered, for she was very tender-hearted.

Mollie went to the telephone. The others listened anxiously for an inkling of what the message might be.

"What!" cried Mollie. "Paul missing--he must have gone out right after I did! Oh, dear! And it's beginning to snow!"

"Girls!" she cried, turning to the others, and letting the receiver fall with a bang, "little Paul is missing--mother thinks

he went out of doors. Oh, that poor child!"



CHAPTER V

UNPLEASANT NEWS

Will was the first to realize the import of the message. He exclaimed briskly:

"Gone out; eh? Well, it won't be hard to track him, for there is a light, new covering of snow on the ground and sidewalks. That is, if we get right at it. Come on, Mr. Blackford, and we'll find the little rascal!"

"Of course we will!" cried Betty. "Don't cry, Mollie dear. He can't be lost for long; everyone in Deepdale knows him and whoever finds him will take him home."

"Yes, but he--he may freeze!"

"Oh, it isn't cold!" declared Grace, though she was even then shivering. Grace was not any too well built to stand cold weather.

"That's it! Stick to it!" whispered Will in her ear. "Insist that it isn't cold."

"I'll come with you and help search," suggested Amy, who had been bidding her callers good-night. "I wonder if we ought to have a lantern?"

"It would be useful," spoke Betty.

"I have one of those pocket electric flash-lights," remarked Will.

"And I can get another," said Amy. "I'll be right with you, as soon as I get my coat and rubbers."

Soon the six young people were tramping through the storm, which seemed to be increasing in severity, though knowing how Mollie would worry about her little brother being out in it, the others kept insisting that it was a mere flurry, that it would amount to nothing, and would soon be over, or turn to rain.

But the snow did not itself hold out any such mild promises as that, and Mollie shivered as she felt the cold and cutting blasts of wind, which had a lower temperature than on the ice that afternoon.

They reached Mollie's house to find a very much excited and tearful Mrs. Billette, the widow being ministered to by some of her neighbors who had hurriedly come in, on hearing from a servant what had happened.

"Tell me all about it, Mother!" cried Mollie, partly lapsing into French in her excitement. Mrs. Billette spoke entirely in that language now.

It appeared that little Paul had been allowed to stay up later than usual without being undressed, as he had a new picture book to look at.

Then company had come in, and, in the abstraction of playing hostess, Mrs. Billette had forgotten about Paul until a little while before. He had been missed and a hasty search had not disclosed him in the house, but had shown the absence of his little cap, coat and rubbers.

"And he has gone out! Out into the storm!" cried Mrs. Billette on Mollie's shoulder. "Oh, my little Paul!"

"There, there, Mother, we'll find him!" declared Mollie, more bravely than she felt. She had dried her own tears under the stress of looking after her mother.

"Of course we shall!" affirmed Will. "Scatter and search now. Get more lights!"

Fortunately Mollie had some of the pocket torches and soon the little party of searchers was going about the house. In the mantle of newly-fallen snow it would seem to be an easy matter to pick out the child's footprints and at least trace in which direction he went.

Will was the first to locate them, and a joyful whoop told of his success.

"Here they are!" he called. "He came out of this side door, and headed for the river----"

"The river!" screamed Mrs. Billette, clutching at Mollie's arm.

"Hush, Mother! It is frozen over, you know. He can come to no harm, I'm sure."

"Oh, Will, hurry! Do! Find my little baby!" cried the frantic mother.

Will dashed on, followed by the others. They kept their electric torches aglow, and could easily trace the line of tiny footsteps, since no other persons had passed down this way over the Billette property to the frozen Argono.

A sound near the boathouse attracted Will, and he turned in that direction, seeing instinctively that the steps led there. Then he saw a flash of light in the structure where, in addition to some craft owned by Mollie, was stored Betty's motor boat, the *Gem*.

"Are you in there, Paul?" cried Will.

They all waited anxiously for the answer.

"Ess," was the childish answer. "What oo want? I goin' way off in boat. I goin' be Robbyson Tuso."

"Oh, Paul!" reproached his mother. But her voice showed relief.

They pushed open the side door of the boat house, which had been left unlocked that day--inadvertently, it seemed--as a man was doing some repairs to Betty's craft.

They saw Paul gravely seated in the boat, which he had managed to get into by means of a chair. He had a lantern with him, taken, it developed, from where Isaac, the furnace man, had left it for a moment in the Billette kitchen. And Paul was gravely playing that he was Robinson Crusoe, starting off on a voyage.

"Oh, Paul, how could you frighten mamma so?" asked Mollie, as she caught him up. "You should be punished!"

"Pichure in my book about Robbyson Tuso. He got in boat--I go in boat. Betty no care--does oo?"

"No, dear, not about my boat. But----"

"You were very, very naughty!" said Mollie, severely, "and sister doesn't love you any more. Naughty Paul!"

The sensitive lip of the toddler began pursing outward, quivering. His eyes filled with tears. Then catching sight of Grace, who, with the others, formed a circle about the recovered lost one, Paul smiled through the gathering mist of tears and asked:

"Oo dot any tandy?"

And he laughed with them as Grace produced some chocolates in a bag. And no one remarked on her failing--that time, at least.

Paul was soon in bed, having made many promises not to offend again. Then Will went back with Amy, Mr. Blackford escorting Betty and Grace, who lived near each other. The girls promised to meet again next day, but this was hardly necessary, since scarcely a day passed that they were not together--"inseparables," they had been dubbed.

Of course for the next few days little was talked of except the prospect of going to the winter camp. From the parents of the three, tentative permission had been wrung, Grace's father and mother being much in favor of her making the trip.

"Her lungs are none too strong," Mr. Ford had said to his wife, "and the winter in the pine woods will do her good."

"If only there is no danger!"

"Danger! Nonsense!" Mr. Ford had exclaimed.

But he did not know what was in prospect, or he might not have been so positive. Even as it was, a few days later brought unpleasant news to him.

He had been in correspondence with the old lumberman and his wife, and had practically arranged for them to take charge of the camp, and look after the girls, who would occupy one of the large cabins, if they went to the woods. Then came a letter from a brother lawyer who was looking after some details of the receivership.

"By Jove! That makes it bad!" exclaimed Mr. Ford on reading this communication.

"What is it, Daddy?" asked Grace, who happened to be in the library with her father when the mail came in.

"Why, Travert writes me that Jallow has begun cutting timber on the strip that is in dispute. Valuable timber, too, that I'm sure belongs to me. This is contrary to the ruling of the court. I must stop this if I have to come to an open fight!"

"Oh, Father, will this stop us going to camp?"

"No, not necessarily. The strip is far enough away from the camp itself. I don't know but what it will be a good plan to have you on the ground, Grace. You can let me know if anything happens. Now I must see what I can do about this. If only I could find Paddy Malone, and he could testify about the changed boundary lines, I'd have none of this trouble," and Mr. Ford sighed.

"Maybe we can find him up there, papa," said Grace, softly.

"Maybe; but I doubt it. I've been trying for a year to locate him, and can't. But never mind. Don't let this bad news worry you. You and your chums can go there all right, and have a good time. Maybe you'll have more of a time than you want. It looks as though we would have a hard winter."



CHAPTER VI

PREPARATIONS

"How many dresses are you going to take?"

"I wonder if we ought to bring along something for evening wear?"

"Anyhow we want something warm."

"And what about shoes--or boots? How would it do to wear leggings, like the boy scouts?"

"I'm sure we won't want anything like evening dresses. Where could we wear them up in the wilderness?"

"Why, perhaps there may be a lumbermen's dance."

"Oh, listen to Mollie! As if we'd go!"

"Why not? Of course we could go if we had a chaperone," and Mollie, who had proposed this, looked rather defiantly at her chums.

The other foregoing remarks had been shot back and forth so quickly, in such zig-zag fashion, that it was difficult to tell who said which; in many cases the authors themselves being hardly able to identify their verbal creations.

The girls were at the home of Grace, discussing, as they had been doing ever since it was practically decided that they were to go to camp, what they should take, and what to wear. It was far from being settled yet.

"Well, I'm sure of one thing," remarked Grace, "and that is that, as Amy says, we ought to have at least two warm cloth dresses."

"An extra skirt, too, would be no harm," added Betty. "If we go out in deep snow the skirt is sure to get wet, and then we could change on coming in."

"Yes, I think that would be wise," admitted Mollie. "I am almost tempted to wear--bloomers!"

"Mollie Billette!"

"I don't care," and she spoke defiantly. "More and more girls are coming to wear them. Why, if we wear them in the school gym I don't see any harm in using them when we go camping."

"But up there--where we may meet a lot of rough lumbermen, who wouldn't understand--I'd like it, really I would," confessed Betty. "But I guess we'd better not. It's different here, and at school."

"Yes, I guess it is," admitted Mollie with a sigh. "But we can wear skirts of a sensible length, and leggings. I'm glad we thought of those. They'll be much more comfortable than boots, and not so heavy. But what about a light dress? Do you think we'd have any use for one? There's no use taking along a lot of clothes we won't wear."

"That's right," said Grace. "I spoke to papa about it, and he said that while there were often little affairs among the lumbermen and the residents up there, they never thought of wearing light clothes in winter. They'd think it queer if we did, and went to any of the parties. So let's don't bother with our fancy duds."

"Good!" cried Betty. "We'll be real outdoor girls, and dress as such. Well, so much is settled. I'll make a note of that," and she proceeded to set down the facts agreed to.

"Let me see," she mused, "what's this?" and she frowned over some cabalistic marks on her paper.

"Can't you read your own writing?" asked Amy with a smile.

"Well, it looks like 'hats,' but I'm sure I didn't mean that. We settled that we'd wear Tam-o'-Shanter affairs, or caps, so it can't be hats. Oh, I have it. It's 'eats'--what are we going to do about food?"

"Papa says," spoke Grace, "that we can get lots of canned stuff up there. The store that used to supply the lumbermen is open. And we can send some cases of things from here. We can get fresh meat three times a week, and eggs from the farmers when they have any. So make a note of that, Little Captain."

"I will. But, as I understand it, the lumbermen have all left your father's camp now--it's in the hands of a receiver. Maybe the store will close."

"No, father said the country people depend on that store for their things. It wasn't just a camp grocery. It will be all right."

"Well, that settles the two important items of food and clothing," remarked Betty, checking them off on her list. "Of course we'll have to do considerable ordering, and decide on what variety we want to take, but that can be done later."

"Next, let me see what is next--oh, yes, how are we going to get to the camp--walk, ride, or----"

"Skate!" interrupted Mollie. "Why can't we skate there? It isn't so very far."

"And drag our baggage and sandwiches along behind us on sleds?" asked Betty.

"Too much work," declared Amy. "Let's hire a sled, get up a straw ride and go in style."

"Oh, say, what about Mr. Jallow? Do you think he will make trouble up there?" inquired Amy, glancing rather apprehensively at Grace. "You know you said your father told you about his beginning to cut timber and----"

"Oh, we needn't worry about that," declared Grace with confidence. "The strip in dispute is far enough from the camp."

"Isn't it mean to have even that little worry, when it seemed as if everything was going to be so nice?" murmured Mollie. "And that Alice Jallow! I met her and Kittie on the street yesterday afternoon and I just cut them both--dead."

"Mollie, you never did!" cried gentle Amy.

"Yes I did, and I'll do it again. I guess they were surprised, for I heard them chattering like two--two crows--when I passed on."

"Serves them right--the way they talked about Amy," exclaimed Grace.

"Oh, but I don't want you girls to get into trouble on my account--to fight my--my battles for me," faltered Amy. "It is unpleasant enough as it is, without making it worse."

"Now don't you worry, little one," said Betty soothingly. "We can look after ourselves, and I'd like to know why we should not break a lance or two in your behalf."

"Of course!" cried Mollie.

"You're a member of our club," declared Grace, "and club members must stand up for each other."

"Certainly," agreed Betty. "I don't like quarrels any more than you girls do, but I do think that Alice Jallow ought to know that we resent what she said."

"Oh, she knows it all right!" exclaimed Mollie. "I took good care that she should! She's a regular--cat. No other word expresses what I mean, and I don't care if it isn't a nice thing to say about a girl. She deserves it."

Amy flushed and looked troubled.

"Don't let's talk about it," suggested Betty quickly, catching an appealing glance from her little chum. "We all know there isn't the least foundation for it, any more than there was at first, and that's an old story."

"Oh, yes, there is a little more basis for it," said Amy in a low voice, and with a hasty look around.

"There is?" cried Betty, before she thought. "Oh, I didn't mean that!" she added quickly. "Don't tell us--unless it will make you feel better, Amy."

"It will, I think. I have been going to ever since the day Alice hurt me so, but I couldn't seem to come to it. But of late there has been a change in--in Mr. and Mrs. Stonington."

"Don't you call them Uncle and Aunt any more?" asked Grace in a low voice.

"I do to their faces--yes, but I don't think of them that way," and Amy's voice faltered.

"Why?" Betty wanted to know.

"Because, by the merest accident, I found the other day, a piece of paper in--in Mr. Stonington's desk. I had read it before I realized it and it intimated that a mistake had been made in assuming that the envelope pinned on my dress, when I was rescued from the flood, was really intended to be on me. In that case Mr. and Mrs. Stonington would be no relation to me."

"But if the envelope with their names and address on it was found on you, why shouldn't it refer to you?" asked Mollie.

"Because there were *two* babies rescued in that flood."

"Two babies?" It was a general chorus of surprise from the three girls.

"Yes. I was one. There was another. A man saved both of us, and set us on an improvised raft. He found the envelope lying loose near us, and as it was nearer to me he pinned it on my dress, assuming that it had come from my sleeve. But it may have been on the other baby."

"How did this become known?" asked Grace.

"Through this man. It seems that some newspaper reporter, on the anniversary of the flood in Rocky Ford--that's where I was found--this reporter wrote up the former incidents about it. He interviewed several who had made rescues, and this man was one. He told of having found two babies, and one paper. I know Mr. and Mrs. Stonington, who read this account, must have had their doubts about me raised anew, for I overheard them talking very earnestly about it."

"Poor Amy!" sighed Grace.

"Yes, it's dreadful not to know who you are," said Amy, with a rather cheerless smile. "But I am getting used to it now. It did hurt, though, to hear what Alice said about it that day."

"I should think so--the mean thing!" snapped Mollie, her quick temper on the verge of rising.

"But I know, no matter what happens, that Mr. and Mrs. Stonington will always care for me," Amy went on. "If it were not for that I don't know what I'd do. Now let's talk of something else--something more pleasant."

"Oh, this isn't unpleasant for us!" Betty hastened to assure her chum. "Only of course we know how you must feel about it. If we could only help you in some way!"

"I'm afraid you can't," said Amy softly. "It's good of you, though."

"It's like one of those queer puzzle stories, that end with a bump, in the middle, and leave you guessing--like 'The Lady or the Tiger,'" asserted Mollie. "I can't bear them. I get to thinking of the solution in the night and it sets me wild."

"Yes, it is like that," agreed Amy gently. "But I don't see how it can ever be known on which baby the envelope belonged."

"What became of the other baby?" asked Grace.

"I never heard, and the man who rescued me did not know either," answered Amy. "He turned us both over to the relief authorities, and, assuming that I belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Stonington, because of their address on the envelope, on my sleeve, they sent for--for my uncle, as I suppose I ought to call him, though he may not be--and he has kept me ever since."

"But there is just as much chance that you were the baby on whom the paper was pinned, as to think that you were not," came somewhat positively from Betty.

"Yes, I suppose so," Amy agreed. "But, please, let's talk about going camping. I want to forget that I may be a--nobody."

"You'll never be that, Amy--to us!" declared Mollie, positively.

"Thank you, dear."

"The question still to be settled," broke in Betty, determined to change the conversation, "is how are we to go to camp. Shall we skate or sled or----"

"Ice boat!" cried the voice of Will Ford at the door. "Ladies, excuse me, but I have arrived at a most propitious time, I observe. I overheard what you said. Allow me to suggest--an ice boat!"

They looked at him with rather startled glances, and he added:

"Shall I explain?"

"As it seems to be an unguessable riddle--do," urged his sister. "Did you bring any chocolates?"

"I did."

"Pay as you enter," said Mollie, laughingly.



CHAPTER VII

OFF FOR CAMP

Will entered with the air of one conferring a favor, and successfully evaded the efforts of his sister to take away a certain box he was carrying.

"Have patience, little sister mine!" he mocked. "Have patience, and you will get your desires."

"You mean thing! and I haven't had a chocolate all day. How did you come to bring them?"

"Amy asked me to," he said boldly.

"Oh, Will Ford! I did not!" and Amy blushed a "lobster red," as the lad ungallantly informed her.

"Well, anyhow take them, and dole them out," he added, tossing the box of confectionery into her lap.

"Oh, Amy, I always loved you!" confided Grace, "shooting" a look of wonder at her brother.

"And while Amy passes the treat, perhaps you will kindly elucidate the riddle of the ice boat for us," suggested Mollie, catching a marshmallow chocolate which Amy deftly threw across the parlor.

"Nothing very complicated about it," replied Will, himself munching on some candy that he produced from a hidden source--likely one of his seemingly innumerable pockets. Betty said she never could understand how a boy could remember all the pockets he had--fourteen she once counted, when she had Allen Washburn enumerate them for her.

"It's this way," went on Will, with tantalizing slowness, but Grace knew better than to try to hurry him. "Allen and Frank and I have bought a big ice boat."

"You have?" cried Grace. "You never told me a thing about it." She looked her keen reproaches.

"Well, I'm telling you now," said Will. "It is a second-hand one, and used to belong to the Chacalott Club, down the river. They bought a new one for racing purposes, and Allen heard of the chance to get this one. He told me, I told Frank, Frank told--told----"

"Oh, spare us the horrible details!" protested Grace. "Where do we come in?"

"In the ice boat, of course. Where else did you expect?" and Will grinned at her like a Cheshire cat.

"Provoking!" murmured Grace. "Do go on."

"Yes, do," urged Mollie. "We've got so much to do yet!"

"Well, as I said, we have a big, roomy ice boat," went on Will. "It isn't as comfortable as your *Gem*, Betty, and has no cabin."

"No cabin!" cried Amy. "I thought all boats had to have cabins."

"An ice boat is like a pair of stilts, crossed," explained Will. "There's no room for a cabin, but there is a sort of cockpit on this one. It will hold ten when they aren't spilled out on the way."

"Spilled out?" queried Mollie. "That sounds interesting."

"It is--when you're not spilled," said Will. "You see in a stiff breeze the ice boat sort of rears up on its hind legs, like an auto going around a curve on two wheels, and there the spilling begins."

"As I said, the cockpit of the *Spider* will hold about ten comfortably, and if half spill out, why so much the more comfort for those who succeed in holding themselves in."

"But what about us?" asked Grace.

"Oh, we'll hold you in," volunteered Will, cheerfully.

"No, I mean do you really intend for us to use it to go to camp?" insisted his sister.

"I sure do. It's a dandy boat--the *Spider*, and----"

"*Spider!*" exclaimed Betty with a little shiver. "What possessed you to take such a name?"

"It looks like a water bug--the ice is not far removed from water. Hence *Spider*. Do you get me--or the spider?"

"Oh, you boys!" sighed Grace. "Girls, shall we consider it--the ice boat?"

"It will be just the proper caper," said Will. "We can take you all up in one load, and your suit cases, too. Trunks can go by express. Then we can stay a week or so with you in the cabin, and----"

"You can stay--you boys--who said so?" demanded Grace a bit defiantly.

"Dad. I asked him. There are several furnished cabins there, and we can use one, he said. Oh, don't worry, we won't bother you," and he glared at his sister. Grace and Will did not get along any better than the average brother and sister, it will be noted.

"I think it would be nice," spoke gentle Amy, hastening to pour oil on troubled waters. "It wouldn't be quite so lonesome--with the boys there."

"Bless you for saying that!" exclaimed Will, with mock heroics. "You shall be doubly repaid. We'll see that you are never alone, Amy."

She blushed, but did not seem displeased.

"And as we boys are going anyhow," went on Will, "you girls can come in the ice boat, or not, just as you choose. I only thought I'd offer it."

"It's kind of you," declared Mollie.

"I think ice boating would be lovely," vouchsafed Betty.

Seeing her chums thus in favor Grace capitulated.

"All right," she said. "We'll go, with you boys."

"And you needn't think you are doing us a favor, either!" asserted Will a bit truculently. "We can get other girls. There is Kittie Rossmore, Alice----"

"Stop it!" commanded Grace, and Will subsided. He knew better than to keep on in that strain.

"The boat is a dandy, though," he went on. "We can pile the cockpit full of fur robes, and when the wind is right we can scoot up the lake to beat the band!"

"Such slang!" cried Grace.

"Well, I only meant hat band--or rubber band. That isn't slang."

And so it was decided. Will went on to describe the boat from the rudder and runners, to the sails and tackle, most of it being as Greek to the girls. But they made up their minds to soon learn how to run a craft on the ice.

"And if things go right I'll soon have a better one than the *Spider*," declared Will, as he prepared to take his leave.

"You mean you are going to buy another?" asked Grace.

"No, not buy--make one--and it will be a surprise, too, let me tell you!"

"How?" asked Betty, interested.

"Oh, you'll see when the time comes. It's a secret."

This naturally roused the curiosity of the girls, but Will, having accomplished his purpose in doing that, refused to talk further and left in a hurry, Frank having called for him.

As for the girls, there were many details yet to be settled, even though the matter of food and clothing had been decided, in a measure.

In the days that followed Mr. Ford reported that he had succeeded in getting Ted Franklin and his wife to go to the lumber camp, to live in one of the cabins and assume charge as care-takers.

"They'll have a cabin all ready for you girls," the lawyer had said to his daughter. "It will be near theirs, and if Will and the boys want to go up for week-ends, there is a cabin they can use."

"But, Daddy, tell Will not to bother us. He's sure to play some kind of tricks."

"Oh, I guess you girls can look after yourselves. Now, about getting yourselves and your things up there----"

"We've arranged about ourselves," said Grace. "We're going in the ice boat up the river. But our trunks----"

"I'll have them shipped. I have also sent an order to the storekeeper there to supply the cabin with stock provisions. The others you can buy as you need them. Now I guess that's all."

"Is Mr. Jallow cutting any more trees?"

"Yes, and I haven't succeeded in stopping him. There may be trouble--of a legal kind only," he hastened to assure his daughter, who looked alarmed. "Don't worry. Only if you should happen to run across that Paddy Malone up there--that old lumberman--hold on to him, or at least get him to communicate with me. With his testimony I can beat this Jallow."

"I hope we can find him," observed Grace.

There were seemingly a hundred and one things to do before starting off for camp, but somehow they got done. Betty was very busy, for though Grace had initiated the idea of the camp, the Little Captain naturally assumed the leadership, as she generally did.

The girls had two or three rides in the ice boat, and liked the experience very much. It was a novel sensation gliding over the frozen surface before a stiff wind. And really the boys managed the *Spider* very well. In spite of the protest of the girls, they refused to change the name, even ignoring the compromise of *Cobweb*, which Grace declared quite poetical.

The day set for the start brought disappointment, for the wind blew in exactly the opposite direction desired, and, after waiting until late afternoon for a change, the trip was given up.

But in the night it grew colder, which was good for the condition of the ice, and the wind shifted. It blew straight up the river toward the distant lumber camp, and early the next morning Will was astir to make sure there would be no delay.

The start was made from Mollie's boathouse, where the *Spider* was moored. The suitcases were piled in the forward part of the cockpit, which was well provided with rugs. Then with Allen at the helm, and Will and Frank to look after the sail, the girls took their places.

"All aboard!" cried Will, looking at his sister and her chums. "Hold fast, everybody! Shall I shove off, Allen?"

"Yes!"

The boat glided out into the middle of the frozen river. The wind caught the sail, it curved out, and the *Spider* shot ahead, gathering speed every second.

"We're off!" cried Betty, waving her hands to those who had come to see them start.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" was chorused over and over again.

As Amy waved with the others she little dreamed what a change would take place in her life before she saw dear Deepdale again.

CHAPTER VIII

A SPILL

Straight up the Argono River flew the *Spider*. Crawled would perhaps be a more appropriate term, considering the insect, but the ice boat did not crawl—it literally flew.

"Oh, this is just glorious!" cried Mollie, with shining eyes, as she crouched down amid the rugs near Will, and looked ahead at the white, icy stretch.

"It's the most comfortable form of motion I ever imagined could be," said Betty. "I'm so glad you thought of it, Will. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

"It's a little too swift for me," confessed Amy.

"Swift! I wish we could go faster!" exclaimed Mollie.

"We'll go faster soon, when we get around the bend," spoke Allen. "Then we'll get the full force of the wind, and then----"

"Yes, and then will be the time you girls will have to hang on, even by your eyelids," declared Will. "You'll see!"

"Oh, is it as scary as all that?" asked Grace.

"You won't mind," declared Frank, soothingly. "He's only trying to scare you."

Amy looked a bit timid, but a reassuring glance from Betty put her at her ease once more.

Truly the ice boat was all that the boys had claimed for it. Roomy, as ice boats go, comfortable and speedy, it was really a prize.

"You deserve a vote of thanks, boys," said Mollie, as the sharp wind brightened the roses in her cheeks.

"Leave it to your Uncle Dudley," declared Will. "I told you that you'd like it."

"Here!" cried Grace, tossing him a chocolate.

"Oh!" he cried, as it hit him in the face, "whence this sudden flow of sisterly kindness."

"As a reward for your thoughtfulness in providing the boat," said Grace.

"That means I'll have to look out, or she'll be wanting me to do something more before night," spoke Will.

"I hope Mr. Franklin has fires lighted in our cabin," remarked Grace after a bit. "It will be real chilly, I'm afraid," and she drew her very becoming furs closer about her. Her face was framed in them, and she looked, as Allen said, "like a picture on a magazine cover."

"I don't know whether to feel complimented or not," she confessed with a laugh. "I only know I'm cold-d-d-d-d! Burrrr!" and she shivered.

"It isn't as warm as skating," said Allen. "But perhaps this may help," and with one hand he took from a box a long, round object. "It's a vacuum bottle of hot coffee," he explained. "I didn't think, until the last minute, or I'd have brought chocolate, Grace."

"Oh, coffee will do just as well!" she hastened to assure him. "It is just what I want to drive the shivers away."

"There are some cups there in that other box," said Allen to Frank. "If you'll get them out, and pass the refreshments around."

"Happy to oblige!" exclaimed Frank.

"There is sugar and milk already in the coffee," explained the young lawyer. "I hope none of you object."

They did not, as it developed, and soon they were sipping the hot beverage while gliding along, the wind having died out somewhat.

As they made the turn around the bend, a little later, they got the full force of the breeze, which, increasing in power, sent them along so suddenly that the ice boat tilted on two runners.

"Oh, dear!" screamed Grace, clutching Mollie, and causing her to spill what remained of the cup of coffee.

"There, look what you did!" snapped the French girl, quickly.

"I--I didn't mean to," said Grace, contritely. "I thought we were going to spill."

"This was the only 'spill' there was," laughed Betty, as she helped Grace wipe up the trickling beverage.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said Mollie--"mollified Mollie," as Will expressed it later. The little flash of temper died out almost as soon as it showed.

"Steady all!" called Allen, for the girls were moving about, and he needed less motion in order to handle the boat easily.

They were proceeding along at a fast pace when, from behind one of the boathouses along the shore of the frozen river, there shot out a small ice craft, containing two persons. It was so sudden, and cut so sharply across the path of the *Spider*, that Allen narrowly avoided a collision.

"Why don't you look before you come out?" he called sharply to the steersman of the smaller craft.

"Why don't you keep more to the middle of the river?" was the retort, and then the boat shot around and took the same direction as the one in which the *Spider* was going.

"Why, there's Alice Jallow in that boat!" exclaimed Betty. "Did you see, girls?"

"Sure enough! So it was!" agreed Mollie. "But who is that fellow with her?"

"Harry Brook," answered Will.

"Do you know him?" demanded Grace, quickly.

"A little. He's a new lad in town."

"Has he been going with--her--long?" asked Betty.

"I don't know. First time I ever saw him with her. Mind that chunk of wood just ahead, Allen."

"I see it, thanks. That fellow gave me a scare, though. I never saw him until I was almost into him."

"That's right," assented Frank. "I guess he doesn't know much about running one of these things. How are you coming on with your----" he added, looking at Will.

"Do you think it will rain?" asked Will, promptly, looking up into the cloudless sky, and nudging Frank sharply. "Keep still," he whispered.

"What is it?" demanded Grace. "Do you know his secret, Frank?"

"If he tells--I'll have revenge!" cried Will in theatrical fashion. "Mum's the word, old man," and he glanced significantly at Frank.

"All right--don't worry," was the retort.

"They seem to think they are having a race with us," remarked Allen, nodding in the direction of the other boat. It was a little distance ahead, but off to one side, a considerable space of glittering ice separating the two craft.

"Maybe he saw us coming, and shot out that way to make Alice think he was some ice yachtsman," suggested Will. "I'll tell him what I think the next time I see him."

"Oh, don't make any more trouble, Will," begged his sister. "We seem to be on the outs enough with the Jallow family. I only hope we don't meet Mr. Jallow up in the woods."

"He wouldn't dare annoy you," spoke Allen. "I know something about your father's case, and I think, when it is next tried, that Jallow will lose. He deserves to, I think, and I have gone over most of the evidence."

"If we could only get that missing lumberman to testify," said Grace, "it would end it all in papa's favor. But I suppose that is too much to hope for."

They were moving swiftly along now, and were a little more than a quarter of the way to the lumber camp. They intended to stop at noon, which would see them three-quarters there, and eat the lunch they had brought along.

It did seem that Alice and the young fellow with her invited the *Spider* to a race, but Allen knew better than to accept. The other boat was a light craft, built purposely for racing, whereas the larger boat was not.

Gradually the boat containing the two occupants drew away up the river. Our friends gave it little thought until, when they were discussing the advisability of eating lunch, Frank called out:

"Here he comes back, tacking against the wind."

"Yes, and he doesn't know how to do it," said Allen in a low voice. "He'll have trouble if he doesn't watch out."

The small boat came nearer and nearer, gliding from side to side of the frozen river to make distance against a quartering wind.

"Look out where you're going!" suddenly cried Allen, as he saw the craft headed directly for the *Spider*. "Luff there! Luff!"

Evidently in the emergency the other boy lost his head. He came straight on, but Allen was not minded to suffer a collision. Quickly he shifted his helm, and so quickly that the next moment the *Spider* overturned, spilling them all out.

There were hoarse shouts from the boys, and shrill screams from the girls as Allen, who had managed to jump clear, raced after the still moving boat to prevent it becoming damaged.

And, as he looked back to see the figures of his friends more or less entangled in luggage and fur robes, scattered over the ice, he saw the boat, the action of which had made it necessary for him to spill, herself turn over, throwing out Alice and her friend.

"Anybody hurt?" asked Will, as he sat up, a robe around his shoulders.

"Guess not," answered Frank, taking a quick survey of the girls. They were laughing now, and getting up.



CHAPTER IX

GETTING SETTLED

Only a glance was needed to show that none of the party of campers had been more than bruised. They were all up now, getting rid of the entangling rugs, and collecting the scattered baggage, which had slid over the ice in various directions.

"Never mind that," advised Allen, who was busy with the ropes of the ice boat. "Let's right this, fellows," he suggested, "and see if it's damaged any. It doesn't look so; but we'd better make sure."

It was no easy task to get the boat on her runners again, but the girls lent their strength, no small feature in the aggregate, and soon the *Spider* was on her legs again, if that be the proper term.

"Look--they seem to be having trouble," remarked Betty, pointing to the overturned ice boat with one hand, while with the other she tried to get her rebellious hair in some sort of order. Her locks had become loosed--as had those of her chums--in the spill.

The youth who had been responsible for the accident was standing near Alice, seemingly ill at ease. Alice Jallow appeared to be crying. The boat was some distance off, and it needed but a glance to show that the mast was broken.

"Maybe she's hurt!" suggested Will, starting on the run toward the two figures. Allen had lowered the sail of the *Spider* and had tossed out a sharp-pronged ice anchor.

"Shall we--I wonder if we had better go to Alice?" asked Mollie, doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, we must, I think," spoke Betty. "Come on, girls." And even Amy, who might have been excused for not going, under the circumstances, started toward Alice, while Allen and Frank seeing that there was assistance enough, worked to get their own craft in shape, and to replace the rugs and luggage.

"Are you--can we help you--is there anything the matter, Alice?" asked Betty, gently, as she reached the sobbing girl.

"I can't get her to tell me," spoke Harry Brook. "But I don't believe she's more than scared."

"I am so! My elbow hurts terrible!" exclaimed Alice, petulantly.

"Perhaps if I look at it," suggested Grace, laying a hand on the arm of Alice.

"I'll thank you to let me alone!" was the snappish retort. "It was your fault we upset, anyhow. Let me alone!"

"Whew!" whistled Will. "Well, I like that!"

And his sister and her chums wished they were free to express themselves as forcibly.

"Our fault!" cried Will. "Why, you came right for us, Brook! You know you did. We had to jibe to get out of your way, and that's what put us in bad."

"I know it--I'm sorry," Harry had the grace to answer. "My mast is broken, too. The rudder seemed to jam, and I couldn't shift it."

"Well, I guess we can be of no service here," said Betty, a bit coldly. "Come on, girls," and without so much as a glance at the girl who had spurned their kind offer the four chums started back. It was very evident that Alice was not much hurt, for she walked off to one side.

"Shall I give you a hand at righting your boat, Harry?" asked Will, after rather an awkward pause.

"Yes--if you will. I guess I don't know so much about ice craft as I thought I did. It was easy enough going before the wind, but when I turned to tack I had trouble. I'll just run her up on shore and see what I can do to-morrow about getting a new mast. Any of your crowd hurt?"

"No, only their--feelings."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, well, accidents will happen." Will looked narrowly at Alice, but she averted her gaze. Then, when Harry had

assured him there was nothing more to do, Will set out to rejoin his friends, while Harry, after sliding the ice boat to shore, set off down the frozen stream with Alice.

"I wouldn't like to be in his shoes," remarked Frank when the situation had been explained to him. "Alice will have it in for him, all right."

"Well, perhaps after her show of uncalled-for temper he'll not want to have anything more to do with her," said Mollie. "I wouldn't--if I were in his place."

Allen found that their ice boat had not been in the least damaged, and when the spilled-out possessions had been gathered up and replaced, they resumed their way with the hoisting of the sail.

"I hope the lunch isn't spoiled," remarked Grace. "I'm hungry."

"So am I," was the general admission.

A few miles farther on they came to a sheltered cove where they stopped and ate dinner. They made hot chocolate over a little fire of driftwood on shore.

Then they kept on up the river, the wind holding good, and about three o'clock reached the lumber camp. Allen sent the ice boat up to the little dock in proper style, and one after another the young people leaped out.

"Whoop!" yelled Will. "Here we are! Whoop!"

"Be still, you--Indian!" begged Grace.

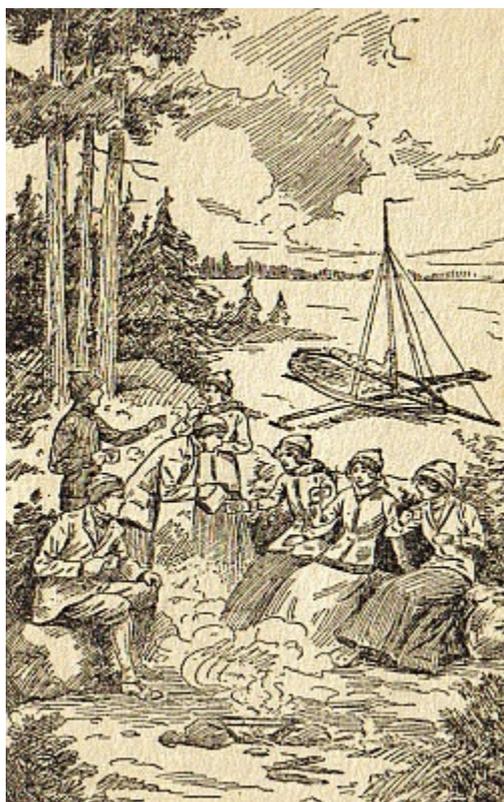
"Indians always whoop," he said. "I want to let Franklin know we're here!"

From one of the cabins, clustered in the wood, a short distance back from the shore of the frozen river, came a grizzled but pleasant-faced man. In the doorway stood a short, stout woman, smiling a welcome.

"Well, you got here, I see," remarked Mr. Franklin, genially, as he took two suitcases. "Mother and I've been expecting you, and we've got a hot supper all ready but putting on the table."

"Oh, that was too much work, though it's lovely of you!" protested Grace.

"We expected to cook our own meal," added Mollie. "You will get us into bad habits."



"THEY MADE HOT CHOCOLATE OVER A LITTLE FIRE OF DRIFTWOOD."—Page 78.

The Outdoor Girls in a Winter Camp.

"Eatin's the best habit I know of!" chuckled the care-taker. "I've been acquirin' it for a good many years and it hasn't hurt me yet. I expect to keep right on with it, too. I hope you didn't lose your appetites on the way."

"No danger," remarked Will. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes. All your stuff come; there's a lot of grub, plenty of wood, and all you've got to do is to enjoy yourself."

"Has that fellow--Jallow--or any of his men made trouble?" Will asked, when the girls had gone on ahead.

"Not much; no. I did catch one of 'em on our land the other day--on land there's no question but what your father owns. I ordered him off."

"Did he go?"

"Yep."

"Peaceably?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I had to sort of--shove him off, and I'm afraid he stumbled and bumped his nose," chuckled Mr. Franklin.

"That's the way!" cried Will, laughing.

The cabins to be occupied by the boys and girls were close together, and that used by Mr. Franklin and his wife was not far off. All three were near to the water, and back of them was a forest of big trees, gaunt and bare now, their black limbs tossing restlessly in the wind.

Baggage was put away, a hasty survey was taken of the camp and the cabins, and then, as it got dark soon, Mrs. Franklin, with whom all the girls fell in love at first sight, suggested an early supper. And a most bountiful one it was, though the dining room was rather taxed. But that only made it the more merry.

"And now to get settled!" exclaimed Betty, as she and the girls went over to their cabin.

"You'll find the bunks all made up!" called Mrs. Franklin, "and if you haven't covers enough you'll find more in the big chest."

"That's good," agreed Grace. "I hate to be cold!"

"You want to get more flesh and you'll be warmer!" said Amy, who was rather plump.

"Ugh! Flesh! Never!" declared the willowy Grace.

They began unpacking their trunks and suitcases, each one appropriating part of the bureaus and wall space. From the cabin of the boys came shouts and laughter.

"Cutting up--as usual," observed Grace. "Oh, I wonder if I left out that big box of chocolates?" and frantically she began searching in her trunk.

CHAPTER X

WARNED OFF

"Girls, it's gone!"

Thus cried Grace, as a further search of her possessions did not reveal the box of candy.

"What is?" asked Mollie, who had not heard the first frantic cry.

"That lovely big box of chocolates father gave me! I'm sure I put it in the tray of my trunk when I was packing, but now----"

A perfect storm of things seemed to fly from the trunk, not only the "annex," as Mollie termed the tray, but the "main hotel" as well.

"Grace, you'll have this room a perfect sight!" protested Betty.

"Can't help it!" returned the chocolate-lover. "I must find it. Amy, you were with me the day I packed; what did I do with that box with the pink ribbon?"

"Oh, that; why the last I saw of it was on your dresser. Don't you remember? You took it out for a moment, after putting it in, to see if your ribbon box wouldn't go in that place better. Then you----"

"Yes, I know!" interrupted Grace. "I forgot to put it back. Then the telephone rang, and I went to answer it. Will was in talking to you when I came back again, and----"

"Perhaps he did not take it--you may have simply left it home," suggested Betty.

Grace nervously tossed her possessions back into her trunk. There came a knock at the cabin door.

"Come!" cried Mollie, who was in the outer apartment.

"I say, Grace!" cried Will's voice as he entered. "There are two buttons off my coat--must have torn loose when we upset. Sew 'em on, will you?"

"Not now, Will, I'm busy--I can't find something. I'll sew 'em on to-morrow."

"Yes, around noon. We fellows are going off early. There may be a bear or two up here, and we brought our guns, you know."

"I can't bother."

"Then Amy will," said the boy. "Say 'yes,' Amy, and I'll give you a lovely box of chocolates, with a pink ribbon on!"

"Will Ford!" cried Grace, striding up to him. "Give me my candy this instant!"

"Your candy?" Will pretended much surprise.

"Yes, certainly, my candy. The box of Walford's papa gave me!"

She pulled his hand from behind his back and there was revealed the missing box of confections.

"There it is!" Grace cried. "I knew he had my candy!"

"Your candy? Say, Sis, if it's yours, how in the world did it get in my suitcase, I'd like to know?"

"Was it there?"

"Honor bright!"

Grace looked puzzled for a moment, and then she exclaimed:

"I see now. I had it in my hand when I went in your room as you were packing. I wanted to get a piece of wrapping paper for it, and just then you cut your finger, and----"

"Yes, and you ran out like a scared cat, and dropped the candy in my suitcase," finished her brother. "I thought you meant to give it to me, so I kept it, and toted it up here. Now will you sew those buttons on for me?"

"Yes, Will," answered Grace, meekly, as she accepted the box.

"I thought that would fetch you around," he said with a cheerful grin. "Never mind, Amy, next time it will be you."

The unpacking was finished, bunks were prepared and for a little while, before turning in for the night, Will and his chums called on his sister and her friends. Mr. Franklin dropped in to see if the young folks needed anything. He had filled a number of lamps for them, so there was no lack of light, that winter evening.

The ice boat had been safely moored, plans had been made for breakfast, and the boys had evinced a determination to get up early and go hunting.

"Are there any bears up here, Mr. Franklin?" asked Amy, nervously, looking out of the window.

"Well, there has been known to be a few, especially in a hard winter. They come out once in a while to sort of feed-up on our stock, if they haven't eaten enough to sleep 'em through to Spring."

"Would you call this a hard winter?" Amy went on.

"Well, middlin' so," was the slow answer.

"What are you driving at, Amy?" Mollie wanted to know.

"It's a problem in geometry," said Will. "Things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. A bear comes out to feed in a hard winter--this is a hard winter, therefore a hungry bear is equal to a hard winter. Eh, Amy?"

"It wasn't that at all!" she declared, blushing. "I only was wondering if they would--would annoy us here."

"I won't let 'em bite you, Amy!" said Will, with a protecting, brotherly air--too brotherly, Grace said it was.

"I guess all the bears you'll get down here you can put in your trunk," laughed the old woodsman. "Well, I must be gettin' back. This is late for me. 'Most nine."

Indeed, they were all tired from the day's travel, and soon the boys had been "shooed" away and the girls let down their hair.

After a hysterical half-hour or so, which always seems to follow when one retires after a day spent in getting to a strange place, the girls were asleep.

Amy awoke with a start shortly after midnight. She knew this because a light left burning low in the living room shone on a small clock. And as the girl listened she heard a crunching sound out on the frozen snow.

"Some one is trying to get in the cabin!" was the fearsome conclusion to which she jumped. Then in her fright she called: "Betty--Mollie! Wake up!"

Mollie was the first to rouse.

"What is it?" she asked, sitting up in bed.

"Some one outside--they're walking around the cabin. I'm sure they're trying to get in. Oh, please call Mr. Franklin, or the boys! I'm so frightened!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mollie. "Wait until I take a look. No use sounding a false alarm."

Grace and Betty wakened at the sound of the others' voices, and asked what was going on.

"I'll look out and see what it," volunteered Betty, her room being nearest the window. She slipped from bed and a moment later called:

"Sillies! It's nothing but Mr. Franklin's dog keeping guard around the house. He's walking like a sentinel. Go to sleep, all of you."

"Oh, I'm so relieved!" murmured Amy, but it was some time before she closed her eyes again for an uninterrupted slumber.

Morning came, with no further alarms having been reported, and, after some confusion, due to their new environment, the girls got their breakfast. They sent over some hot pancakes to the boys, for they could tell by the sounds coming from their cabin that the meal there was not progressing favorably.

In spite of the fact that Mr. Franklin was not very encouraging about the presence of bears, the boys determined to

go off and see for themselves. They each had a gun.

"Then we girls will go for a walk," decided Betty. "The woods must be interesting at this time of year. And it isn't as cold as it was yesterday."

They set out, comfortably equipped for a walk, with short skirts and leggings, for the snow was rather deep. There were woodland trails and logging roads and the girls alternated on them; seeing much to wonder at and admire, for the woods in winter are more interesting than many suppose who have never seen them except in Summer or Fall.

The girls went on for perhaps three miles, and were thinking of turning back, for it was nearing noon, when a voice hailed them from a dense growth of hemlock trees.

"I say, you folks will have to git away from there. You're on private ground. Git off!" and there stepped into view a burly, roughly-dressed man, accompanied by a bulldog. Master and dog looked equally savage.

"Go on!" ordered the man, "before I----"

CHAPTER XI

THE RIVALS

Grace clutched Mollie, and Amy made an equally effective seizure of Betty. The two girls whose nerves were under better control than those of their two chums stood their ground--if not sturdily, at least with the appearance of it. They stared at the man, for want of something better to do, as Mollie afterward admitted. And the man found their gaze a bit disconcerting, it was evident, for he shifted uneasily, first on one big-booted foot, and then on the other.

"Well, be you goin' t' git?" he finally asked. "I tell you this is private land, and Mr. Jallow don't allow nobody on it 'ceptin' them he hires."

This gave Mollie an opening.

"Oh, is this Mr. Jallow's land?" she asked, and her chums wondered at the sweetness of her tones.

"It be," the burly guard replied, "an' you'd better git off."

The dog growled, and looked up inquiringly at his master as though asking for orders.

"We--we know Mr. Jallow," went on Mollie. Then nudging Grace, she whispered: "Say something; can't you? This must be the piece your father is having trouble about. Say something."

"I--I don't know what to say," faltered Grace. "Oh, let's get away from here! That dog----"

The animal growled, as though resenting the tone in which Grace talked about him.

"Do come," urged Amy. "I'm all in a tremble. The woods are big enough without getting on this disputed land."

"I tell you you'd better go!" insisted the guardian of the forest. "I'm supposed to keep trespassers off, an' I'm goin' t' do it, too!" Evidently he did not like the looks of the girls whispering together. Perhaps he may have imagined that there was a conspiracy to kidnap him and take possession of the property in dispute. He moved nearer to the girls, the dog following him.

Grace uttered a little cry.

"Now I ain't a-goin' fer t' hurt ye!" exclaimed the man, "an' I don't want t' be no harsher than I have t' be, but you folks must move back, else I'll have t' make ye go. I'm on guard here, and----"

"Oh, we'll go," said Betty quickly, "but I don't see what harm we were doing. The woods seem all alike to me."

"Well, mebbe ye wasn't doin' no particular harm," admitted the man in surly tones, "but my orders is to keep trespassers off, an' I'm goin' t' do it!"

"It's hard to tell where Mr. Ford's land ends and Mr. Jallow's begins," said Mollie, looking for some sign of a boundary mark. The man started.

"Be you folks from Ford's camp?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes," said Grace, taking heart, perhaps, at the mention of her father's name. "I am Miss Ford."

"Well, I'm sorry, but now you'll have to go quicker than if you was some one else!" said the man firmly. "I thought you was jest ordinary folks, but I've got very strict orders not to let Mr. Ford nor nobody who represents him, set foot on this land. So that's your game; is it?" and he leered at them.

"Game! We don't know what you mean!" said Mollie with asperity. "We certainly are up to no game."

"Indeed not!" echoed Betty indignantly. The girls, even Amy and Grace, had recovered their "nerve" now. The opposition, when they knew they had done no real harm, was enough to make them assert themselves for their common rights.

"Well, you'll have to git right away from here. I won't stand for no nonsense!" cried the fellow. "Fer all I know you may be tryin' some law-dodge on me. Move on!"

He advanced threateningly, and the dog growled menacingly. Even Mollie and Betty were not brave enough to stand their ground now, and they were preparing for a precipitate retreat when the sound of a shot was heard close at

hand.

The man uttered an exclamation of alarm, and the dog barked, ending in a howl.

"Ha! More trespassers!" ejaculated the man. "Are they with you? Are they friends of yours?" he asked cunningly.

"They might be," answered Mollie, thinking of the boys who had gone hunting.

"Well, if that's the case," began the man, "I'll have to----"

But he did not finish, for, at that instant, Will, Allen, and Frank came out from behind a clump of bushes. Will bore a gun that still had smoke coming from the muzzle. The boys started at the sight of the girls, and looked wonderingly at the man who was so evidently threatening them.

"What's up, Sis?" demanded Will, striding forward.

"Has this--fellow--been annoying you?" asked Allen.

"I warned 'em away--they are trespassing on Mr. Jallow's land," said the man, but his manner was much softened. Evidently the sight of the three young huntsmen had had a good effect.

"Oh, so this is Mr. Jallow's land?" inquired Allen quickly. "Is this the part that is in dispute?"

"I don't know nothin' about no dispute," was the sullen response, "but I know what my orders are, and I'm going t' carry 'em out."

"Far be it from us to stand in the way of you doing your duty," remarked Will pleasantly. "But if you have been annoying these young ladies----" he paused significantly and looked at his two chums.

"Oh, he--he didn't annoy us!" said Grace quickly. She wanted no unpleasantness.

"I am glad of it," spoke Will.

"Perhaps you will be glad enough to point out just where the boundary marks are," said Allen quietly. "We may be walking in these woods often, and we would not like to trespass if we can avoid it. Where is the dividing line?"

The question evidently took the man by surprise. He seemed confused.

"It's somewhere about here," he muttered. "I seen one of the stone piles a while ago."

"Perhaps the young ladies were not trespassing at all," went on Allen. "In that case I have to point out that you have exceeded your authority. You may even be a trespasser yourself, on Mr. Ford's land. If you are, don't be alarmed. We shall take no extreme measures."

"Huh! Think you're smart; don't you? Maybe you're a lawyer?"

"I am!" was the quiet answer "And I know my rights, and those of my friends."

"So that's the game, is it? You're tryin' t' establish a right here. Well, you can't do it! I order you off."

"First show that you have the right," insisted Allen. "Where is the dividing line?"

The man looked up and down through the woods. He went a little way backward, and then forward. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"There it is--back of you!" he exclaimed. "You're all on Mr. Jallow's land now, and I order you off. Them stone piles are the points in the line. That big pine tree is another mark. The line runs right along here, and you're all trespassers."

"Well, if that is the correct line, perhaps we are," agreed the young lawyer. "And we are willing to go--for the time being. But it looks to me as though those stone piles had been very recently put up, and the blaze on that tree is certainly a fresh one."

"I don't know nothin' about that," growled the man. "All I was told was that this is the line, and to keep strangers off; so I'm going to do it!"

"And we don't blame you," went on Will, recognizing that it would be poor policy to quarrel with a mere guard. "If we question this at all it will be with those in authority."

"Huh! If you lock horns with Mr. Jallow you'll be sorry for it," said the guard. "Now you'd better go. My dog is

getting uneasy."

"He'd better not get *too* uneasy," remarked Frank significantly. "Come on, girls," and the girls, who had been getting more and more nervous as the talk proceeded, were glad enough to precede the boys off the disputed territory. The man stood sullenly watching them, while the dog growled deep in his throat.

"Well, you had quite an adventure; eh?" asked Will when they were out of earshot of the man.

"Yes, and I was so afraid something would happen," said Grace. "He came upon us so suddenly!"

"Evidently Mr. Jallow means to contest this land business!" exclaimed Allen. "I should like to look into this matter myself. I don't like the looks of those stone piles."

"Father is sure there has been some unlawful change in the boundary line," spoke Grace. "But it is hard to prove. Oh, if we could only find that old lumberman, Paddy Malone."

"Perhaps we may come across him in our wanderings," suggested Mollie.

"Did you boys have any luck hunting?" inquired Betty, when the details of the encounter with the man had been given.

"Not a luck!" exclaimed Will. "We all fired at one poor little rabbit, and he ran home and told his mamma on us, I guess."

"Well, you won't go hungry," said Amy.

"Why, are you girls going to invite us over to lunch?" asked Will quickly. "That's great, fellows! For this unexpected pleasure--many thanks!" and he bowed low.

"I--I didn't exactly mean it that way!" stammered Amy, blushing, and looking at her friends in some alarm at thus being so quickly taken up. "I meant that you had plenty of food in your own cabin."

"Oh, no, Amy! You can't take it back that way!" cried Will, waltzing around with her in the snow. "You gave us an out-and-out invitation; didn't she, fellows?"

"Sure," chorused Frank and Allen.

"Oh, well, I guess we can stand you for one meal," said Grace. "Shall we, girls?"

The others were willing, and the hunters were soon with their friends, making merry at table.

The weather, which had been threatening, became more so toward night, and the next two days it snowed. It did not keep the outdoor girls in, but they did not go far from the cabins, as Mr. Franklin said they might easily become lost. The boys shoveled paths for them, and spent much time in hunting, but with poor luck. The girls managed to fill in the time, and they declared they would not have missed coming for anything.

Amy seemed to have recovered her spirits under the influence of her friends, and in the fresh, bracing air of the Winter woods. Letters from home came for all the girls and boys, but mails were not very frequent.

Going for food, cooking, doing the work of the cabin, taking walks filled up the days completely, and then there came a thaw, a rain and a freeze. The young folks spent much time on the river then, skating and ice boating, and having good times generally.

Then ensued another mild spell, during which long walks were taken to distant parts of the big lumber camp. The place where the logs were cut and hauled to the river, and the saw mill, now deserted, where some of the big trees were made into beams, were inspected by the curious ones.

One afternoon, following a long tramp, while the boys and girls were on their way to camp they made a curious discovery. Since the encounter with the man (the story of it having been sent to Mr. Ford) no further trouble had been experienced. But Grace and her chums were careful to keep on their side of the boundary.

On this occasion, however, they approached it closely, and looking off through the trees of the land Mr. Jallow claimed, Mollie espied smoke coming from a log cabin.

"Why, someone's living over there!" she exclaimed. "I never noticed that before."

"Neither did I," agreed Betty. "I'm sure no one was in it when we passed here two days ago!"

As they paused to look several persons came from the cabin, which had evidently been built for camping purposes.

"Look!" exclaimed Grace in a low voice.

"It's Alice Jallow!" exclaimed Mollie.

"And Kittie Rossmore!" added Betty.

"Who are the two fellows with them?" Grace wanted to know.

"One is Jake Rossmore--Kittie's brother," spoke Will, "and the other is----"

"Sam Batty!" interrupted Frank. "Two cronies if ever there were any. I wonder what this means?"

"It looks as though they were camping out--just as we are," said Mollie. "And, look, there is Mrs. Jallow. Oh, they've seen us!"

It was indeed so. Mrs. Jallow, her daughter and Kittie looked up and saw our friends--their rivals. Then the three newcomers started for the boundary line, the two boys remaining at the cabin.

"Shall we--shall we wait?" asked Betty in a low voice.

"We're on my father's land--I don't see why we should run," said Grace calmly. "Especially from--them!"



CHAPTER XII

IN A BIG STORM

"How do you do?" asked Kittie sweetly--too sweetly, the other girls mentally decided as the three rivals approached the boundary line. "We hear you are camping up in these woods."

"Yes," remarked Betty a bit coldly. Really they had no quarrel with Kittie, though she was the chum of Alice, and always siding with her. Kittie had never said anything actually mean. "Yes, we are here. Are you camping too?"

"We are," said Mrs. Jallow, taking up the conversation. Evidently she did not propose to do as her daughter did, and not speak, for Alice, with a supercilious air, had not so much as addressed a word to the outdoor girls and their boy friends. "We are in one of Mr. Jallow's cabins. We like it very much."

"Yes, it is nice," agreed Grace. Amy had taken no part in the talk, and Will, sensing her feelings, took her arm and led her along the path, pretending to show her some curious moss formation on the trees.

"Where are you staying?" went on Mrs. Jallow. She must have known of the feeling between her daughter and the other girls, but she was credited with being a very curious person, and she may have been willing, for the sake of acquiring information, to sink her personal feelings. Naturally she would side with Alice.

"Oh, we are in one of the cabins my father owns," said Grace.

"Going to stay long?"

"We don't know."

"That is the way with us," went on Mrs. Jallow. "Jim--that's Mr. Jallow, you know--has quite a lot of timber to get out of that new tract, and he wants to finish before Spring. So as I was sort of run down I thought I'd take a rest and come up with him and the girls and boys. Your folks all well?"

"Yes," went on Grace, who seemed to have had the office of spokesman thrust upon her.

"I'm sorry about the trouble you had with Hank Smither," went on Alice's mother.

"Hank Smither?" questioned Mollie.

"Yes. He's one of Mr. Jallow's men, you know. He ordered you off, the other day. But you must excuse him. He was only carrying out our orders, and I've no doubt Mr. Jallow will be glad to let you come over and see us."

"Oh, Mr. Smither didn't annoy us," said Grace easily. "We realized that the poor man was only carrying out his orders. Thank you for the invitation, but I don't know as we will have much time for calling. We are up here to get as much fresh air as we can."

"Humph!" sneered Alice audibly.

"Well, we mustn't let business quarrels interfere with we women folks being friendly," said Mrs. Jallow in what she probably meant for a conciliatory tone, but which she only succeeded in making patronizing.

"No, indeed, we don't intend to," said Betty, calmly. "We hope you will enjoy it here."

"Well, the young folks do, if I don't," said Mrs. Jallow. "I like more conveniences than you have in a log cabin. But then it may do my nerves good to get a rest."

There was a little pause--rather an awkward one--and then Grace said:

"Well, girls, we had better be getting on. It's late."

"Yes, and I must see about supper," said Mrs. Jallow. "I wish you'd come over." She did not heed the eye-telegraphic signals her daughter was flashing at her. But the other girls understood.

"Thank you," said Grace again, non-committally.

"Well--good-bye!" said Mrs. Jallow, a farewell in which Kittie joined faintly, but Alice, without a word, turned her back and marched toward the cabin, where the two boys still were.

"She tried to find out all she could," said Mollie when the outdoor girls had gotten out of sight in the woods.

"That's all she talked for."

"Yes, and I believe they just came up here camping because they heard we were here," went on Betty. "Oh, I do hope we don't get into any trouble with them."

"It will have to be of their making," said Grace firmly. "I'll never set foot on that land Mr. Jallow claims if I can help it. It might complicate legal matters."

"That is a wise decision," said Allen, viewing it from a lawyer's standpoint. "Let the trespass come from them, if there is to be any."

They talked over the unexpected meeting with their rivals, and speculated as to when they had come, and the motive that brought them, also, to a winter camp.

"I believe it's just to spy on us!" declared Mollie. "We have evidently frightened them, Grace."

"Then they must have something to be frightened about," said Will. "I do wish we could get on the track of something, or somebody, who could let us know how to prove that the boundary is wrong; for wrong father surely thinks it is."

"We'll do the best we can," suggested Allen. "I am going to send for copies of the deeds, and then we'll look along the present boundary marks. I may be able to see if they have been changed. I once studied surveying."

"I want you boys to promise something," said Grace, as they neared their cabin.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"Not to have any quarrels with those girls--Alice and Kittie."

"We never quarrel with girls," said Will.

"Well, then, with those boys, either."

"We won't do anything to provoke a quarrel if they don't, Sis," Will promised. "But we're not going to let them walk over us; eh, fellows?"

"Of course not!" cried Frank.

"Oh, but please don't get into a--a fight!" begged Grace, and she meant it.

"All right, little one; here is a chocolate for thou!" laughed Will, as he crowded one into her mouth.

For a few days our friends saw nothing of Alice and the rival campers. They did not go toward the part of the wood where the Jallow cabin was located, and Mrs. Jallow did not bring her charges toward the place where our boys and girls held forth.

There was little for Ted Franklin, Mr. Ford's man, to do, save to keep a watch over the camp, visiting the distant points on different days. In his trips he was often accompanied by some of the young people, who much enjoyed his company, for Mr. Franklin was an old woodsman, and many an interesting bit of information, or lore, he gave out, to the profit of the boys and girls.

"Hurray!" exclaimed Will one day, when a belated mail had come in. "Here's a letter from Mr. Blackford. He says he's coming up to pay us a visit soon."

"That will be nice," spoke Mollie. She had taken quite a liking to the young business man, and he seemed fond of her.

"We'll have some fun," said Frank. "We'll show him the woods, all right."

"Oh, he is no tenderfoot," declared Allen.

It was several days after this that Will proposed an ice boat trip. The river was in fine condition, and the wind was just right.

"The only thing is that it looks like a storm," said Betty. "We don't want to go too far."

"We won't," promised Will.

They got an early start, and took some food with them, intending to stay until afternoon. Though they did not plan

to sail far, it was so glorious, once they started to glide along, that there was a temptation to continue, and when, by consulting her watch, Mollie discovered it to be some minutes after noon, they were many miles from camp.

"Oh, we must stop!" she exclaimed. "The wind may die out and we can't get back!"

"All right--let's have the eats then," proposed Will. A halt was made, and on the bank, under the shelter of some big trees, they built a fire, made chocolate and partook of the sandwiches they had brought.

"This is all right!" exclaimed Frank, munching on some bread and chicken, a sentiment with which they all agreed.

Betty was nervously glancing at the sky now and then.

"Do hurry!" she urged her chums.

"Oh, don't fuss so," advised Mollie. "You won't enjoy your food if you do."

"But I'm sure it's going to storm."

"Let it!" said Will recklessly.

Five minutes later the first flakes began falling. This brought even Will to a sense of possible danger. The things were hurriedly collected, the young people got into the *Spider* and the sail was hoisted. Off they glided down the river toward their camp.

"We'll beat the storm there!" boasted Will.

"I don't know about that," said Allen slowly, as he cast a glance aloft. "It looks to me as though it was going to come down hard soon. And the wind is freshening."

The white flakes did increase in volume a little later and the wind sighed mournfully through the pine trees on shore, and through the rigging of the ice boat.

Then, with a suddenness that was almost terrifying, the storm broke over them in a fury so often witnessed in wintry outbursts. The snow was blinding, and was whipped into their faces by an ever-increasing wind.

"Why--why, we can't see ten feet ahead!" cried Frank.

"Oh, slow down--don't run into anything!" begged Betty.

"I guess I had better lay to a while, until we see what it's going to do," decided Allen, as he lowered the sail. "It's too much of a risk. There may be open water, or an air hole, or another boat on the river."

And then, as the craft came slowly to a stop, they gazed out at the big storm which enveloped them, hiding the shores from sight.



CHAPTER XIII

THE MISSING PIECE

"Say, this is no fun!" exclaimed Will, when ten minutes had passed, with no cessation of the fury of the wind and whirling white flakes.

"It is keeping up," spoke Mollie in a low tone. "Can we ever get back to camp?"

"Of course!" cried Betty quickly. It was no time now to have anyone's nerves go to pieces. "Certainly we can get back, if we have to walk; can't we, boys?" and she gave Allen a look that made his eyes sparkle as he answered:

"Certainly. It will be more fun walking, anyhow."

"Spoken like a true hero," said Will in his ear.

"The boat can't go if the snow gets very deep," observed Frank.

"And it is getting heavier every minute," declared Amy, looking over the side of the cockpit of the ice boat, and brushing some of the white crystals from the frozen surface of the river. "There's nearly half an inch now," and she shivered slightly.

"Are you cold, dear?" asked Betty, passing over a spare blanket, for they had brought along plenty of coverings and wraps.

"No, not exactly cold, Betty, but----"

"Don't say you're worried, my dear," whispered Betty, as she tucked some stray strands of hair under her Tam-o'-Shanter. "Grace is so nervous lately," went on Betty, under pretense of wrapping the robe around Amy. "I don't know what is the matter with her, but she seems to fly to pieces if you look at her."

"Perhaps it's worry about this lumber camp business."

"It may be. Anyhow we don't want to get her alarmed. We may have hard enough time as it is."

"Oh, Betty! Do you think--anything will--happen?"

"Of course--lots of things will happen!" laughed Betty, Grace and Mollie having gotten out of the boat to stroll about a bit. "We'll have a nice walk home, and a good hot supper, and then we'll sit about the fireplace and roast apples and marshmallows, and talk about this."

"That listens good," observed Will rather sarcastically, "but it may be a long while before you're sitting before your own fireside, or we in front of ours."

"Well, you don't need to make the announcement of that fact; do you?" asked Allen, as he straightened out some of the running tackle of the sail.

"So that's the way the wind lies; eh?" asked Will in a queer tone. "What's the answer, old man?"

"Just this," replied Allen. "We may not be able to go on in the boat. I thought this was only a snow squall, but it seems to be turning into a regular blizzard. You know we can't glide over the ice when it's covered with snow. We may have to walk back to camp, and it's no small stretch. What I mean is that we've got to keep up the courage of the girls. That's all."

He and Will and Frank were out of the boat now, fixing one of the ropes that had gotten out of place, so Betty and Amy, who remained cuddled up in the soft and warm robes, did not hear the talk.

"So that's the game--bluff?" asked Will.

"Somewhat--yes. I'm going to try to start off again, but I don't know how far we'll get. Where's Grace and Mollie?"

"Hey--Grace!" cried Will, raising his voice. "We're going to start!"

"All right!" floated back the answer through the storm.

Soon the girls came running up to the ice boat. They had been racing about, they said, to get warm, and Betty and Amy, sitting amid the furs and blankets, rather wished they had done the same, for they were quite chilly in spite of

their coverings.

"I'm going to make a try for it," explained Allen. "We may not be able to go far, for the snow is rather wet and heavy, and it may clog the runners. But we'd better make a start, anyhow. It seems to be slackening up a bit."

They piled into the ice boat, and the sail was hoisted. The *Spider* darted off, after a moment's hesitation.

"Hurray!" cried Will. "We're moving."

"And that's about all," said Allen in a low voice. "Don't crow until you're out of the woods. This snow is worse than I thought it was."

For a time the ice boat went along well, halting occasionally as masses of snow clogged the runners. Then there came a jolt, and a puff of wind nearly upset it, as the craft did not properly answer the helm.

"Oh, my!" screamed Grace, as she clutched Betty. "We are going to upset."

"No, we're not!" declared Allen, as he loosed the halyards, letting the sail come down on the run. "I guess we'll have to abandon the *Spider*," he went on, "and tramp it. The snow is too heavy. We may upset."

"Well, the girls are good walkers," observed Frank.

"Which is a blessing," spoke Will. "Out of the *Spider* into the--frying-pan. Don't you ask me to carry you, Sis," and he looked at his sister.

"No danger!" she retorted, haughtily.

The storm, though continuing steadily, had so far lessened in severity that the shores of the river could be made out, standing grim and dark with their fringes of trees.

"We'll just run the *Spider* over to shore," said Allen, "and leave it there. We can come for it to-morrow, or whenever the storm lets up."

"What about the blankets and robes?" asked Will.

"Take them with us. We--oh, well, take them along. They may blow away," and Allen corrected himself.

The girls and boys climbed out of the boat, loaded themselves with the wraps after the craft had been tied close to shore, and started off down the river.

"What were you going to say about the blankets and robes?" asked Will, when he got a chance to speak to Allen alone. "Was it that we might need them--in case we didn't get back to camp?"

"It was."

"Don't you think we have a very good chance?"

"Not extra good--to-night. Of course we'll get there to-morrow, but it will be too bad if the girls have to stay out all night. Perhaps they won't, but if they do we can make a shelter of the robes and blankets."

"That's so," agreed Will.

On they tramped through the storm. It was hard work, for the snow clogged their steps and the wind made the carrying of the heavy blankets an additional burden. But no one murmured.

They kept to the river, and thus were assured of a straight road to camp. It was not like being lost in the wood. The only danger was that they were quite a distance from their cabins, and that night was coming on, and that a big storm was raging. Long since it had passed from the class of a mere squall, in which it seemed to be at one time.

"Did anyone bring the sandwiches we left?" asked Grace, when they had gone on for perhaps a mile.

"I did, and your chocolates, too," said Allen. "Will you have them now?"

"Divide the candy up," said Grace. "They say that persons lost in the snowy Alps eat chocolate."

"You eat it--lost or not," laughed Will. "But pass it around, Allen."

There was a sandwich each, and also a few pieces of candy for each one, as Allen divided them, and the eating of the bread, meat and sweets did really put new energy into them. They trudged on in better heart now.

"But we're still a good way from camp," said Allen, as he peered as best he could at the landmarks on the shore. "It will take us another hour."

"And it will be dark then," said Amy in a low voice.

"Never mind," advised Betty. "The snow on the ground will make it light, and we can't miss the river. We'll be all right."

Darkness did not bring them in sight of their camp, and they were beginning to lose heart, when Will cried:

"I see a light! It's Franklin's cabin. We're at camp! We're all right now!"

"Are you sure?" asked Grace.

"Certainly. I knew we were near it some time ago."

He gave a hail, which was answered, and soon the young people heard the welcome call of Mr. Franklin, who demanded to know where they had been, and what had happened.

"There's a light in our cabin!" exclaimed Will, as he saw the gleam in the window. "Who's there, Mr. Franklin?"

"A friend of yours--he says."

"A friend of ours!" exclaimed Allen. "Is it Mr. Jallow, masquerading under that name, and trying to get possession of this land as well as the other valuable strip?"

"No, it isn't Jallow," replied Mr. Franklin. "I know him. This is a young fellow you've been expecting, he says. He come up in a hired rig from the village. Blackstone--Blackrock--some such name as that he give."

"Oh, Mr. Blackford, yes. We were expecting him. So he has arrived? I hope he made himself at home."

"I told him to," said Mr. Franklin, "and I guess he did. He had quite a time of it in the storm, and I reckon you folks did, too."

"We did!" exclaimed Will. "But we're all right now. Come on, girls, get in and make yourselves comfortable, and we'll bring Blackford over as soon as we feed him."

The girls went to their cabin, the boys to theirs. The latter found Mr. Blackford making himself perfectly at home.

"Well, what brings you up here?" asked Allen, when greetings had been exchanged.

"Boys, I've got good news!" cried the young business man. "I've found the missing piece of paper that tells me what sort of a birth mark my sister has--the sister I have been searching for so long. I could hardly wait to tell you!"



CHAPTER XIV

AN ICE BOAT RACE

"The girls will want to know this!" cried Will, when he had grasped the import of the news.

"Yes, and I want to tell them," said Mr. Blackford. "Somehow or other I have an idea that they can help me to find my sister. I don't know why I feel so, but I have--all along. They have always been so lucky."

"They surely have," agreed Allen. "From the time they first set out----"

"And found my five hundred dollar bill," interrupted Mr. Blackford. "And then----"

"Un-haunting the mansion of Shadow Valley," added Will.

"How did you come to find the missing piece of paper?" asked Frank.

"It was simple enough," replied the young man. "It appears that the corner of the document, describing the birth mark on my sister, was torn off when the firm I have engaged to help search for her, forwarded it to me. One of the stenographers found it in her desk the other day, and they sent it on.

"I had some business in this section, so, remembering your kind invitation to spend some time in your camp, I decided to avail myself of it, and stop over."

"Glad you did," said Will hospitably. "Did the storm bother you?"

"Not much. You were caught in it though."

"Yes. Had to leave the ice boat and tramp back. But we're all right now. We'll hustle around and get some grub," announced Allen. "Then we'll go over and see the girls. They'll be anxious to hear the story. You haven't succeeded in locating your sister yet; have you?"

"No, I've been on a number of false trails, but I somehow feel that luck is going to turn now."

Mr. Blackford, who said he had been invited by Mr. Franklin to make himself at home in the cabin of the boys, turned in and helped them get ready a simple meal. It was now night, and the boys were tired out from buffeting the storm. But they were in good spirits, and glad to see their friend.

After the meal, at which all present displayed good appetites, they went over to the girls' cabin, where they found Betty and her chums in dry clothes sitting before a roaring fire.

"My, this looks like all the comforts of home!" exclaimed Mr. Blackford approaching the blaze and rubbing his hands. "You certainly have it fine here!"

"So you have good news?" queried Grace, for Will had slipped over for a moment to give a hint of what was to come.

"Yes, I have a description of my sister's birth mark now. So if you see her--or if I do--we can identify her."

"I hope we do find her," spoke Betty sympathetically. "What sort of a mark is it?"

"It is the letter 'V' on her left arm, just above the elbow," returned Mr. Blackford.

"That ought to be easy to see--especially in summer time when the girls wear short sleeves," said Will. "But in winter it would be rather awkward going about asking a girl if she had the letter 'V' tattooed on her elbow. She might think you were trying to jolly her."

"It isn't a tattoo mark," said Mr. Blackford, as he consulted the description, the torn-off piece having been pasted on to make it complete. "It's a red birth-mark, this paper says, and is in the shape of a 'V'. I do hope it will lead to something. If you girls----"

"Why--why!" cried Betty springing to her feet. "Amy, you have a mark like that--at least it looks like a mark on your arm. I have often seen it!" Betty was much excited, and Amy turned pale.

"Is this--is this so?" faltered Mr. Blackford eagerly. "Have you such a mark?"

"Not such as you describe," replied Amy with a blush. When the young man had first spoken of a birth mark a rush

of hope had flooded her heart. Now it had receded, leaving her disappointed.

"See," she said, rolling up her sleeve just above her elbow. "It is a mere scar. I have had it ever since I was a child. I don't know how I came by the thing, and neither--neither do--any of my friends." She hesitated at the word.

"No, I'm afraid the mark I am looking for isn't that kind," said Mr. Blackford slowly. "The one spoken of in the missing part of the letter is very definite. I am sorry."

Amy was too, but she did not speak.

"Oh, isn't this too bad!" exclaimed Betty contritely. "I am sorry I spoke, and raised false hopes. But I remembered that mark on Amy's arm----"

"Well, better luck next time," said Mr. Blackford, as cheerfully as he could. "If you girls will continue to be on the lookout----"

"We'll do all we can for you," said Mollie, Amy did not speak again. It might be that she was wishing she had some such clue so that she could locate her missing parents or relatives, whoever they might be.

Mr. Blackford, who had been in Deepdale a few days before setting out for the camp, told the news and gossip of the village.

"Did you hear anything as to why Mr. Jallow brought his folks up here?" asked Grace.

"Nothing definite--no. There was talk that they had come here, and folks were speculating as to why. I wondered if it had anything to do with the dispute over the land."

"We think so, but we can't be sure," said Will. "I have written to father about it, and he has asked us to be on our guard. Jallow may be planning some trick to get more land away from dad."

"Oh, I wish this unpleasant dispute was all over!" sighed Grace. "It makes it so uncertain!"

"Well, don't worry," advised Allen. "We're having a good time up here."

"And we'll have more fun when I get what I've sent for," said Will mysteriously.

"What is it?" asked Grace. "Another box of chocolates?"

"Nonsense! Always chocolates!" cried her brother. "No, this is better. Did you inquire about it when you were in town, Mr. Blackford?" for Will had been corresponding with the young man.

"Yes, and they said it would be shipped this week."

"Good! Then I'll get it next, and we'll astonish the girls."

"Mean thing--not to tell!" pouted Grace. But Will was obdurate.

The storm kept up all night, and part of the next day. The snow was so deep that skating and ice boating were out of the question. But the young people could go on sledding excursions, which they did, Mr. Franklin furnishing the horses and sleigh.

This was a new kind of fun, and was enjoyed to the utmost. They went to near-by towns, and had oyster suppers, going to informal dances afterward. Mr. Blackford stayed, and as he could do little business while thus snow-bound he made arrangements to remain in camp a week or two. The boys and girls were glad to have him, as he was good company, and knew no end of games for an evening entertainment.

Meanwhile, though the young folks often went off in the woods, they had no further clashes with the Jallows. They did not call on their rivals, though Mrs. Jallow, meeting the girls once or twice, pressed them to come.

"But she just wants to ask us questions about father's business," decided Grace. "We'll not go."

And they did not, for it would have been embarrassing for poor Amy.

Once or twice the girls had a sight of Hank Smither patrolling the dividing line between the two properties, but he said nothing, and his dog growled. The girls were careful to keep on Mr. Ford's land.

Then came a miserable week, when it rained and rained and rained again. Much of the snow was washed away, and the boys and girls had to stay in their cabins most of the time. Then it was that Mr. Blackford proved his worth, for he was a royal entertainer, and when he ran out of tricks and games he invented new things to interest them.

"His sister will be a lucky girl--whoever she is, if he takes her to live with him," said Betty one night after an evening of enjoyment.

"That's right," agreed Mollie. "He's almost as nice as--Allen--isn't he?"

"I'm glad you think so," replied blushing Betty.

There came a freeze, and the river was just right for glorious skating and ice boating. The *Spider* had been brought to her dock again, and one pleasant afternoon, when there was a good, but not too cold or stiff a breeze, the party set off for another run. It was cool and clear, with no hint of storm.

They had not gone very far in the ice boat before they heard the approach of another behind them, and soon, to their surprise, they saw in the craft that was rapidly overcoming them Alice Jallow, and her three young friends. As they came up Jake Rossmore called patronizingly:

"Want a race?"

"Sure," answered Allen, nothing loath, for he had faith in his craft.

Soon the two gliders were on even terms, but it was soon seen that the rival boat carried more sail, and was better built for racing. It began to forge ahead of the *Spider*.

"I'll tell them you're coming!" jeered Sam Batty as he waved his hand to those he was leaving behind.

"Oh, can't you beat him?" exclaimed Mollie impulsively. "Do try, Allen!"

"I will, but they have the better boat."

He manoeuvred as best he could, but it was of no use. The other boat shot ahead.

"Wait!" murmured Will. "I'll show them a trick next week."

CHAPTER XV

IN A TRAP

"Well, they beat us," said Frank mournfully, as Allen came up into the wind, and let the *Spider* glide easily over the ice, while the rival craft, its occupants visibly rejoicing, shot out of sight around a bend of the river. "They beat us good and proper."

"Yes," agreed Will. "But I don't believe they can do it again."

"Oh, yes they can," insisted Allen. "They've got a faster boat, there's no denying that. But of course we had a much bigger load than they did. They're lighter. However, I'm not backing water. Those fellows handled her well, too."

"I wish we could have won," sighed Mollie.

"Yes, we'll never hear the last of it from Kittie and Alice," declared Betty. "They'll crow over us every chance they get."

"Let them," said Grace, speaking rather indistinctly on account of a chocolate in her mouth. "Some day you can come out, Allen--just you boys--and have another race with them--a regular race."

"We might win then," agreed the young lawyer, "but I doubt it. Theirs is a racer all right, and ours is built more for pleasure. It's a safer boat too, the *Spider* is. Once or twice they came near having a spill in wind that didn't faze us a bit. I'm glad we didn't have any accidents like the last time we met Alice."

"That's right," said Betty, recalling the two upsets.

"Let them wait," remarked Will mysteriously. "I'll soon have a boat that will beat anything on the river."

"Oh, is papa going to let you get an ice boat?" cried Grace. "I don't care! I don't think it's fair! You get anything you want. You had a new horse and----"

"And wasn't it on your account that dad let you girls come to this camp?" demanded Will. "Talk about me getting all the favors----"

"Children! Children!" admonished Betty with a smile.

"And besides, this has nothing to do with dad," went on Will. "This is something I'm getting up on my own account."

"Oh, tell us!" begged Mollie.

"Nope. It's a secret. You'll see it as soon as it comes."

"Give you a chocolate if you tell," bribed Grace.

"Nope."

"Two."

"Nope!"

"Oh, let him alone," advised Betty. "What are we going to do next?"

"Oh, just sail on--sail on," answered Allen with a laugh. "We won't try any more races though."

They proceeded up the river another mile or so, and had a distant glimpse of their rivals scudding about. Then something else claimed their attention. This was a sight of some men fishing through the ice for pickerel, and the girls at once evinced an appetite for fresh fish.

"Why, we can do that ourselves," declared Will. "We'll try it when we get back."

"Oh, see if you can't get them to sell you some," begged Grace. "They will be fine for supper."

The men were very willing to dispose of some of their catch. They were lumbermen from a distant camp, which fact becoming known, Grace insisted on her brother inquiring if they knew anything of Paddy Malone.

"I used to know him," said one burly fisherman, "but he hasn't been around for a year or so."

"Guess he don't dast come," put in another.

"Why?" asked Will curiously.

"He got into trouble, I hear, and the authorities want him."

"Nothing of the sort," the first man declared. "Paddy is as straight as a fish pole. More likely it's the other way round and he's staying away so as not to make trouble for some one else."

"Maybe," agreed the second man. "Anyhow he isn't around."

"That's true enough."

With their fish the young people started back in the ice boat, Will finding out, by talking with the other lumbermen, that Paddy Malone had not been seen in some time.

The fresh fish were indeed a welcome addition to the table that night, the boys having their share. "We'll have to try this sport to-morrow," decided Will, when he had cleaned off his plate the second time. "They're great!"

Accordingly the next day the boys chopped holes in the ice, and with baited hooks attached to springy branches, set in the ice, with a piece of cloth, that, by its bobbing gave indication of a bite, planned for a big catch. The visual signals enabled each lad to set several hooks.

But either they were not in the right place, or they did not use the right bait, for two small fish were all they caught.

"Those lumbermen have them hypnotized," complained Will. "I'm going up to their fishing grounds to-morrow."

The other boys said they would accompany him. This left the girls to their own devices, since they did not care to go with the boys.

"Who's for a walk in the woods?" asked Mollie, and they all were eager to come along. In their short skirts and leggings they found it easy going, even in comparatively deep snow.

"Oh, it's great to be an outdoor girl!" exulted Betty, as she trudged along beside Grace.

"Yes. I wonder if Carrie Norton, the girl who fell out of the tree, would like this?" ventured Amy.

"She was a real outdoor girl, too," observed Mollie, reflectively.

Carrie, however, who figured largely in the third book of this series, had gone, as has been said, to live with a distant relative. Occasionally she wrote to her young friends.

The girls had gone about a mile, or perhaps two, from their camp, and were nearing the debatable ground where Mr. Jallow claimed a valuable strip of timber. Grace was just about to warn her companions not to trespass, when Amy called attention to something in the woods a short distance off.

"See the cute little log cabin!" she cried. "Let's see if any one lives there."

"If they do they must be frozen!" declared Mollie. "It is full of chinks and cracks."

They approached closer to it. It was not like any log cabin they had ever seen, consisting, as they could see through the open door, of but one room.

"It's probably only a hunter's lean-to," said Betty. "Don't go too close, Amy."

But Betty spoke too late. Curious to see the whole interior of the cabin, Amy stepped across the threshold. A moment later she heard something move behind her. She turned, but not in time.

An instant later a raised, sliding door of heavy logs slid down in grooves, and Amy was a prisoner.

"Oh--Oh!" she cried out. "What has happened?" and she beat on the heavy logs with her little hands. "Oh dear!"

"It's a trap! You're in a bear trap!" cried Betty. "We must go for help!"

CHAPTER XVI

TROUBLE

The girls were stunned for a moment. After Amy's first frantic cry, and Betty's realization of the danger, and the way out, there came, as there often does following a shock, a period of lethargy.

Mollie and Grace, who had clung to each other spasmodically, now separated. Grace, even in this moment sought her sweater pocket, where, as might be supposed, she carried some of her seemingly never-failing chocolates.

"What--what must we do?" asked Mollie, who looked to Betty to answer this question. It was curious how even Mollie, used as she was to thinking for herself, turned to the Little Captain now.

"Get her out, of course. If we can't do it, we must go for help. But we must get her out!" Thus spoke Betty promptly.

"Is--is she really in there?" asked Grace, as though she hardly believed it. Grace had a habit of saying surprising things when least expected.

"Yes, I am in here! Oh, don't go away and leave me!" begged the imprisoned one, sobbing hysterically. "I shall die if you do!"

"That's all right, Amy dear," answered Betty soothingly. "We won't leave you. Or, at least some one will stay with you. But perhaps you can find a way out yourself. Look and see, dear."

But it was only too evident that the bear trap was made to hold whatever unfortunate animal or human being got into it. The affair was like a small log cabin, the whole front consisting of a heavy planked sliding door, dropping down from above in grooves.

The back of the trap was against a great slab of rock, and the sides and roofs were made of heavy logs, notched together at the ends, and spiked. While there were chinks and crevices between the logs they were not large enough for even a cat to get through. The girls, as far as they could see, could find no way for Amy to get out unless the heavy door was raised, and this they did not believe they could accomplish.

"Can you see a way out, Amy?" asked Betty. "Look carefully, my dear."

They could hear Amy moving about in the trap, and presently her voice came falteringly out through the chinks:

"No, there's no way out that I see. Can't you raise the door?"

"We'll try!" called Mollie. But the trouble was that there was no way of getting a hold on the smooth planks.

"We must go for help!" decided Betty after a few ineffectual attempts. "There is no use wasting time here."

"Oh, don't leave me!" cried Amy. "I can't stand it to be here alone!"

"Listen," said Betty. "Grace and I will go for help. It needs a man's strength to raise this door. Mollie will stay and keep you company, Amy. Grace and I will go to where the lumbermen are fishing. That is the nearest place, and the boys may be there also. We'll be as quick as we can."

"Please do!" urged Amy. "Oh, how silly of me to get caught like this!"

"You couldn't help it," said Betty. "Come on, Grace."

They started off over the snow, heading in as straight a line as possible for the river. They knew they were near the place where they had seen the fishing lumbermen, and they hoped to meet some of them there now. The boys had said they were going there to learn the trick of getting pickerel through the ice.

"Are you hurt, Amy?" asked Mollie, when she was left alone outside the trap.

"No, not a bit; only a little scared," replied Amy.

"Well, you'll get over that. How did it happen? Was the trap baited?"

As Mollie asked this she thought of the possibility of the bear, for which the trap evidently had been set, coming along. In that case her position would be worse than that of Amy's who was effectually protected.

"I'd be glad to be in the trap then myself," thought Mollie.

"No, I don't see any signs of bait," said Amy, looking about.

"Then what made the door fall down?"

"It seems to have been propped up with a stick," went on Amy. "When I walked in, so foolishly, I must have knocked the stick down, and the door fell. The prop is here. Oh, I'll never be so curious again!"

The two girls talked to each other to keep up their spirits, and wondered how long Betty and Grace would be.

Meanwhile the two latter were having no easy time. They got into deep drifts, and stumbled out again, tiring themselves greatly in the process. Then they got off the trail, and wandered into the back country. It was not until they got on a high bluff, and saw the river below them, that they realized their mistake.

Then came a hard scramble down a snowy hill, but at length they were on the frozen river, and headed for the place where the fishing was going on.

"We are surely living up to our reputation as outdoor girls," panted Betty as she walked along beside Grace.

"Yes--all but Amy. She is strictly in-doors now."

"Poor child! She does seem to have the most trouble!"

"Well, maybe it will soon be happily over."

"I hope so!"

Neither of them realized how soon the fates were to be kind to Amy in a most peculiar manner.

"There are the fishermen!" exclaimed Betty a little later, as they made a turn in the river, and saw several men on the ice.

"Yes, and the boys are with them. Oh, let's hurry!"

"I can't go a bit faster," said Betty. "You're a better walker than I, Grace."

"Oh, no, only I'm not quite so stout--that's all."

"Stout is very kind of you to say. I'm afraid I'm getting positively--fleshy, Grace."

"Nonsense! You're fine!"

"What's the trouble?" cried Will, running forward as he saw his sister and Betty approaching. "Has anything happened?"

"Yes--yes," faltered Grace. "Poor Amy----"

"Is--is she----" began Allen, as he joined his chum.

"It's nothing at all!" said Betty, quickly, seeing that Grace, in her nervousness, might give them a scare. "She is caught in a bear trap, that's all, and we want you to help get her out."

"A bear trap!" cried Will. "One of those spring ones--with heavy jaws?"

"No, a sort of box trap," explained Betty. "We can't raise the door."

"By hemlock!" exclaimed one of the lumbermen who overheard the talk. "It must be the trap I set for that young fellow over at the Jallow cabin."

"Did you set one for him?" asked Will, quickly.

"Yes, and I told him at the time it was a piece of foolishness. There's no bears around now, anyhow, and I said some one might get in it by mistake and be caught. I only rigged it up temporary. The two young fellows wanted to see how it worked. They sprung it after I set it, but they must have set it again, after I left, to see how it worked."

"Well, it's worked all right--now," said Will, grimly. "Come on, we must get Amy out."

"That's what!" cried the lumberman. "Come on, Bill and Tom. Bring your axes."

The little party was soon under way, led by the lumberman who recalled the location of the old bear trap.

Betty and Grace, with the three boys, brought up in the rear.

"To think of poor Amy being in that trap!" mused Frank.

"Yes, and it was set by Jake Rossmore and Sam Batty," added Will. "I'll give 'em a piece of my mind when I see 'em!"

"Oh, please don't have trouble!" begged his sister.

"Trouble! The trouble will all be on their side," announced Will, grimly.

It was the matter of but a few moments for the lumbermen, expert as they were with the axes, to release Amy, and she fell sobbing into the arms of her friends.

"Oh, take me home! Take me home!" she begged.

"There, there!" soothed Betty, with her arms about the shrinking figure, "you'll be all right soon."

"I told those fellows it was foolish to set that bear trap," asserted the lumberman, "but they would have it."

"Well, there's one satisfaction," grimly spoke one of his companions, "it will need a lot of repairin' before it's fit for use again," for they had chopped the front away to more quickly release Amy.

Will was peering about, and, as the party made ready to start for the cabins, the lumbermen going back to their fishing, Grace's brother said:

"Unless I'm mistaken this trap is on dad's land, which means that that Jallow crowd must have trespassed here to set it. Take a look, Allen, and see if the boundary line doesn't bring the trap on this side."

"It certainly does," declared the young lawyer. "They were trespassers, all right."

"And I'll let 'em know it, too," said Will.

"Oh, please don't quarrel!" begged Grace.

Amy was fast recovering her composure, and she and her girl chums went on ahead, the boys coming more leisurely. Soon the girls were out of sight in a little valley.

The boys were talking about the recent happening, when, as they came from a little clump of trees, they saw Alice and Kittie, with the two boys who, according to the lumberman, had set the trap.

"Here's where I tackle 'em," said Will.

"Go easy, old man," advised Allen.

"Say, what do you fellows mean by setting that bear trap on our land?" cried Will, hotly, as he advanced toward the two lads. Alice and Kittie shrank back.

"What do you mean?" challenged Jake. "We had a right to set that trap!"

"You did not, and one of our friends was just caught in it. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. And you were on our property, too, not that we care so much about that, though."

"Who was caught?" asked Kittie, and she could not keep the sympathy out of her voice.

"Amy," replied Will.

Alice Jallow laughed.

"We didn't think we'd get game so soon; did we, Jake?" asked Sam, with a grin.

"I'll teach you to make game of us!" cried Will as he strode forward.

Probably the snowball was not meant for him, but one thrown at that moment by Jake struck Will full in the face.

CHAPTER XVII

A SNOW FIGHT

Alice Jallow screamed, and in this was joined by Kittie Rossmore. Then both girls turned and fled. Possibly they anticipated what was coming, for after the white flakes of the snowball had fallen from Will's face, and the red, caused by the impact, had died out, he became white with anger.

"What did you do that for, Jake Rossmore?" Will cried.

"I didn't mean to. You walked right into it!"

"A likely story. I'll fix you for that," and Will sprang forward.

To the credit of Jake and Sam, though this is not to be taken in any sense as upholding fighting, the two boys did not turn back, though out-numbered.

"You fellows are altogether too fresh!" declared Frank. "You go and set a bear trap where you have no business to, and then you pelt us with snowballs. We won't stand it!"

"Better go easy," advised Allen Washburn, though, truth, to tell, his blood was also up. "Better go easy."

By this time Will had reached Jake, and aimed a blow at him. It fell short, and was a mere tap, but Jake retaliated. He swung too wide, and the next moment Will had pushed him into a snowbank. Jake was up again in an instant, however, and there might have been a serious fistic encounter had not Allen cried out:

"Here, fellows! This won't do!"

"But he pushed me!" cried Jake, with doubled fists, while Frank and Sam were regarding each other with none too friendly eyes.

"Yes, and you hit me with a snowball first!" retorted Will. It was very much like two children, but the boys did not realize it at the time. Possibly Allen did.

"You'd better arbitrate," he suggested with a smile.

"I will not!" declared Will.

"Me either," added Jake.

"Then have a snowball fight--two on a side--I'll see fair play," suggested the young lawyer. "That will be a good way out of it. It will relieve your feelings, and no one will be much hurt. Come, here's the line," and he drew one in the snow. "Get your ammunition ready, and I'll give the word. The side that first cries 'enough,' loses, and honor is satisfied."

"I'm willing, if they are," said Frank.

"Yes," agreed Will.

"Go ahead," spoke Jake, and Sam nodded his assent.

"If we only had Mr. Blackford here we could have three on a side," remarked Will to Frank, as they made a pile of snowballs, which example was being followed by their rivals. But the young business man had gone into town to see about some of his affairs, promising to come back by evening.

"All ready?" asked Allen, as he noted that the white ammunition was accumulating. He would have been glad to take a hand himself, but he thought it hardly dignified.

"All ready!" replied Will, and his rivals nodded their willingness to start. "Everybody in the game!"

Then the snowball fight began, and it was sufficiently fierce to allow the rather angry feelings on both sides to be worked off, in perhaps the least harmful manner.

All four of the boys were fairly good shots, and for the first five minutes a number of hits were recorded. Each was struck in the face several times, though most of the shots were on the body. Will received one in his eye that pained him very much.

"That's sure to swell, and be black and blue," he thought. "Well, we'll see what this will do," and he aimed one at Jake. It took young Rossmore full in the ear, and a little later he begged for a truce to rid it of snow.

Meanwhile Kittie and Alice, rather terrified at the impending clash, had hurried on.

"We ought to get a policeman and make that Ford fellow and his chums stop," said Alice, vindictively.

"I guess it isn't all on their side," spoke Kittie, who could be fair. "Besides, there's no policeman here."

"Then I'm going to tell father. I don't believe that bear trap is on the Ford land. They are trying to claim everything. I'm just going to tell father, or Hank Smither. He'll make 'em let Jake and Sam alone."

"Oh, I guess Jake and Sam can look after themselves," said Kittie, calmly. "Only I don't like to see a clash. It makes me nervous. I don't believe it will amount to so very much, though."

The two tramped on, and, as luck would have it, they overtook Betty and her chums, hurrying on to the cabin with Amy. Our friends turning, saw their rivals, and then became aware that their boys were not in sight.

"I wonder where they can be?" asked Mollie. "Did you see Frank, Will and Allen?" she asked of Kittie, ignoring Alice.

"They're back there--fighting," replied Kittie, breathlessly.

"Fighting!" cried Grace. "And Will promised he wouldn't! Oh! girls, I must stop him at once!"

She was about to run back in the direction she had come, when a man, driving a sled containing a bulky object, called to the girls:

"Say, where can I find a Mr. Will Ford around here?"

"Why--why, that's my brother!" exclaimed Grace in surprise. "What is it, please?"

"It's some machinery for him. It's an express piece. Where shall I deliver it?"

"That's his cabin over there," and Grace pointed to where it could just be seen. "Are there any charges on it?"

"Yep. Three dollars."

"I'll pay them. Oh, girls, I wonder what it can be?"

"Will's secret, probably," answered Betty. "I wish he would come;" and she looked anxiously over the trail.

"Don't you wish Allen would come, too?" asked Mollie, slyly.

"Hush!" exclaimed Betty, with a glance at Alice and Kittie.

"Well, I'm going back, anyhow!" decided Grace, as she paid the expressman. "I'll tell Will there is a big box for him, and that will be a good excuse for him coming back. They must not fight. Papa would not like it."

"Well, perhaps that is a good plan," agreed Betty. "I'll keep on with Amy, and you and Mollie can go back to the boys."

"I'll go tell papa, and have him stop Jake and Sam," said Alice, moving off with her chum.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AUTO ICE BOAT

Grace strode ahead so rapidly through the snow that Mollie was forced to ask her to moderate her pace.

"This isn't a race!" was the objection.

"But I want to stop them fighting!" insisted Grace. "Will gets so angry, sometimes, that he doesn't know what he is doing. Papa often said he'd do something desperate in his fits of temper some day. I'm really afraid."

"He's like me," laughed Mollie, frankly. "Only I just flare up for a second, and then I'm sorry for it."

"Oh, well, Will is too," admitted his sister, "but I don't want to give him a chance to be sorry. Come on!"

"If I come any faster you'll have to carry me," panted Mollie. "Remember that I am not a Gibson girl like you."

"Oh, do come!" begged Grace. "They may be rolling and tumbling about in the snow, biting each other----"

"Boys don't fight that way, and you ought to know it," said Mollie. "I detest fighting myself, but I know that when it is done right--if ever there is such a time--there is no biting and scratching."

"Well, I've seen some football games," spoke Grace, and she wondered why Mollie laughed.

The girls were rather surprised, on coming to a point where they could look down on the boys, to see merely a snow battle in progress. The air seemed filled with the flying white missiles, and the four rivals were running back and forth, looking for vantage points. Allen hovered about, seeing that no unfair tactics were used.

Finally, as the girls started forward again, Grace much relieved in mind, Sam Batty pulled out his handkerchief and waved it.

"What's that for?" asked Grace.

"Flag of truce, probably. Very likely he's had enough."

"Oh, Will is down!" cried Grace a moment later, as her brother slipped and fell. Jake rushed forward to deliver a ball at close range, but Allen held up his hand.

"No hitting when one is down!" he decided, and Jake drew back. Then, as Will scrambled to his feet again, the battle was renewed, only two being engaged, however.

As Will vainly dodged a ball aimed at him, which struck him in the face, Grace screamed. Her brother turned quickly.

"What is it?" cried Will, in some alarm.

"Stop that right away!" demanded Grace, "or I'll tell papa, and make him take you home."

"One more shot!" Will exclaimed, and he delivered a large snowball with such good aim that it nearly covered the whole of Jake's face. Kittie's brother staggered about, and when he could get his breath he cried:

"I'm through--I've had enough!"

"Battle's over--cease firing!" laughed Allen. "Well, girls, what's the trouble?" he asked as he and his two friends advanced to meet Grace and Mollie, while Jake and Sam moved off in the direction of their cabin.

"Oh, Will, there's a big express package for you at the cabin!" Grace exclaimed. "You owe me three dollars on it."

"Good!" cried the lad. "I'll give you the money out of my next allowance. It's the motor boat, fellows," he added.

"A motor boat!" cried Betty. "What good is a motor boat up here, with the river frozen?"

"Oh, it's something new--a little idea of my own," said Will. "It's a converted motor-cycle gasoline engine, that can be attached to our ice boat. We're tired of having to depend on the wind. Now fellows, we'll have some fun. Hurry home, and we'll see if we can get it working to-day."

"First you ought to do something to that eye," said Grace. "It will be black and blue; and you'll look disgraceful."

"No one will see it up here," said Will calmly. "It doesn't matter."

"Don't we girls matter?" demanded Mollie.

"Oh, well, I'll put some raw beefsteak on it when I get to the cabin. I've heard that's good. Jake caught me a hard one in the eye."

"Fighting! Disgraceful!" murmured Will's sister.

"It was the best way out--snowballs," said Allen in a low voice, while Will and Frank were comparing notes. "It might have been more serious only for that. It was because they set the trap that Amy was caught in."

"Oh, well then, I'm glad they did fight--with snowballs," returned Grace in a different tone.

The big box had been unloaded in front of the cabin when the boys arrived, and while Grace and Mollie went in to talk to Betty and Amy, the boys proceeded to get out the motor.

As Will had said this was one taken from a motorcycle. It was of two cylinders, and powerful. The boys planned to set it in the after part of the cockpit of the ice boat, and take off the sail. The motor would revolve a wheel at the stern, the wheel having spikes all around the rim. These spikes would dig into the ice and thus send the boat ahead. A lever was provided so that the spiked wheel could be pushed down lightly or hard on the ice, thus regulating the speed of the queer looking craft. The *Spider* could be steered as before, by moving the rear runner.

"Now we'll show you some sport!" cried Will, when he had seen that all the parts of the motor were there. "We'll go some, now!"

But if the boys had hoped to try their new craft that day they were disappointed, for there was more work about installing the motor than they had calculated on. The girls grew tired of waiting, and strolled over to the village, the day being pleasant. They met Mr. Blackford coming from the depot, he having returned to complete his visit with the boys.

He looked rather tired and discouraged, which prompted Betty to ask in a low voice:

"Have you had any trace of your sister?"

"None at all," he said despondently. "I seem to be up against a stone wall, and so do the lawyers and searchers I have engaged. We get to a certain point, and there we stick. After that, all traces of her are lost."

"Poor little sister! I wonder what she will look like, and what she will be like?"

"Then you never saw her?"

"Only when she was a baby, and I a small chap. I do not remember her. But I have not given up hope yet. Now, how are you all, and what has happened since I went away?"

Betty told him, including the news about the new auto ice boat.

"That sounds interesting," declared Mr. Blackford. "I want a ride in that."

"That's more than I do," spoke Mollie. "I'd rather go in an airship."

"So would I," agreed Grace.

But when the next day, after several false starts, and a breakdown, the motor was finally set in motion on the *Spider*, the girls were interested enough to come down to look at it.

"All aboard!" cried Will, who was quite proud of his apparatus. "Come on, girls!"

"Wait until we see you try it," suggested Betty.

"Well, then, get in, fellows!"

Allen, Frank and Mr. Blackford took their places, Allen to steer while Will looked after the motor. Looking to see that all was running smoothly, the big notched wheel at the stern revolving swiftly, Will cautiously lowered it. There was a shower of icy particles as the teeth chipped into the frozen surface of the river, and then the *Spider* slowly forged ahead, under the influence of the motor instead of a sail.

"Oh, they're actually moving!" cried Grace.

"And how fast!" agreed Mollie.

"That's fine!" declared Betty.

"I--I'm going to ask them to give me a ride!" exclaimed Amy. "Oh, it must be glorious!"

"Well, if she's brave enough to risk it, I am!" said Grace positively. "Shall we go, girls?"

"Wait a bit and see what happens," suggested Mollie. But nothing seemed to be going to happen. On up the river went the auto ice boat at ever-increasing speed.



CHAPTER XIX

MAROONED

"Dare we take it out ourselves?" asked Grace.

"I don't see why not," replied Mollie. "I can run a motor car, Betty can manage a motor boat, and this is sort of between them both. Of course we can run it!"

"Will you promise to go slow?" asked Amy, timidly.

"Of course," agreed Betty. "Anyhow the ice is so soft that we can't get as much speed out of it as the boys did the other day."

The outdoor girls were grouped about the auto ice boat at the little dock near their cabin. The boys had gone off on a hunt, a rumor of a bear having been seen about five miles off coming to them by a friendly lumberman.

The girls were discussing the advisability of going out for a little trip in the queer craft that Will and his chums had made. For a week past the boys had run it at various times, taking the girls out on trips, and explaining how the motor and notched wheel operated. The girls had even run it for short distances themselves, under the tutelage of the boys.

A week has passed since it was first run and, though it was voted "great sport," the boys had rather tired of it, especially when the rumor of the bear reached them.

"Will said we could take it whenever we wanted to," spoke Grace, as she arranged some fur rugs in the cockpit. "But are you sure you can run it, Mollie--or Betty?"

"It's simple," replied Betty noncommittally. "It will do no harm to try."

"And it's easy to stop," said Mollie. "Even if we forget to shut off the engine, by pushing down on this handle, the wheel will be raised, and won't cut into the ice. Then it will stop."

"Just as when you throw out the clutch on your auto," suggested Betty.

"Exactly. Come on girls. We'll go for a little run. There's nothing else to do in camp."

The week had been rather a monotonous one, for the weather had turned warm, and the ice was not in good condition for skating. It was almost too soft for the boat, and the boys had rather given it up. But the girls wanted to do something, and the auto ice craft offered them a chance.

They had visited a hunters' camp a few days before, and seen some novel sights, though game was not as plentiful as the hunters had wished.

"Well, if we're going--let's go!" cried Betty in a jolly voice, as she buttoned her sweater more closely about her, and saw that her cap fitted snugly.

"You must expect to get some speed out of it," returned Amy. "But remember you promised to go slow."

"We can't do much else--it's so soft," declared Mollie, digging the toe of her shoe into the surface of the ice.

"Well--let's mote!" exclaimed Grace. "I've got some chocolates, so that if the wind does out----"

"Wind! You forget we don't use a sail," cried Betty with a laugh. "We can get home in a dead calm. So if that's your only excuse for bringing chocolates----"

"We might run out of gasoline," Grace interrupted. "I'll take them, anyway."

"That's right, angel child!" murmured Mollie, "and I'll help you eat them," and she calmly appropriated the box Grace had produced, and selected some choice confections.

Just as the girls were about to leave, having shoved the ice boat out away from the dock so as to get a good start, Mr. Franklin, the camp care-taker, who had been over to a distant section, came running down to the dock.

"Do you think your father is back from his Western trip yet, Miss Ford?" he asked.

"Yes, I had a letter from home to-day, saying he would be home to-night. Why?"

"Well, those Jallows are acting mean again. They're cutting timber on land I'm sure belongs to your father, regardless of the strip in dispute. I'm going to wire him to come up here. This thing ought to be stopped."

"Oh dear! More trouble!" sighed Grace. "Well, do as you think best, Mr. Franklin. I think you'll find papa home. Oh, I wish this was all settled. I wonder why there are such people as the Jallows, anyhow?"

"Probably for the same reason that there are mosquitoes," said Betty. "It's so we will appreciate nice people all the more. But don't worry, Grace."

"Are you girls going out in that boat?" asked Mr. Franklin as he started back toward his cabin.

"Yes. Why shouldn't we?" inquired Mollie, for she saw a look of concern on his face.

"Well, you'll be all right if you stay around here, but the ice is breaking up below and above you, on account of the thaw. It won't be safe to go too far, or you'll meet open water. Be on the lookout."

"We will," promised Betty. "We're only just going out for a practice spin by ourselves. It will surprise the boys."

She did not realize what a surprise she and her chums were to get before long.

After one or two ineffectual attempts the girls got the motor running. Then, looking to see that all was clear, Betty, who was at the helm, gave the word for Mollie to lower the toothed wheel, which engaging on the ice, would move the craft.

At first there was only a shower of soft and rather watery ice. The surface was too "mushy" to enable the teeth to "bite."

"Harder! Push down harder!" directed Betty.

Mollie did so, and then, after hesitating a second as if uncertain whether or not to go, the *Spider* moved off, gradually acquiring speed.

"Oh, this is glorious!" cried Grace as she sat well forward and breathed in deep of the fresh air. "Betty--Mollie--you are wonderful!"

"Oh, it's easy to run," said Mollie, calmly. "I understand it now. Really, it's very simple."

The girls took turns steering, for the boat was not going very fast, on account of the condition of the ice. Once or twice there were booming noises, like the sound of distant cannon.

"What are those?" asked Amy, with a start.

"The ice cracking," explained Betty. "It isn't anything. It often happens on a big surface, and we're on a wide part of the river now."

They went on for a mile or so, until Mollie suddenly clutched the arm of Betty, and cried:

"Look--there's open water ahead!"

"That's right," agreed Betty, as she quickly shifted the helm. "We don't want to plunge into that," for the water looked black and treacherous in contrast with the white ice about it.

They headed for their camp. The sound of the cracking ice became oftener, and more than once Betty looked a bit apprehensively at Mollie. But they tried to conceal their growing uneasiness from Grace and Amy.

Suddenly there came a sharp report, louder than any that had gone before, and, involuntarily, Mollie raised the spiked wheel. The ice boat slowly lost headway.

"Don't stop! Don't stop!" cried Betty. "Keep on!"

"But it may be dangerous!"

"It will be more dangerous to stand still! Don't you know that a moving body has a better chance over thin ice than one standing still? Keep going, Mollie, and head for shore!"

"Oh, I'm sure something is going to happen!" cried Amy.

"Nonsense, be quiet!" urged Betty. "Grace, give her a chocolate! Mollie, lower that wheel again."

Again the "propeller" engaged the ice, and the *Spider* forged ahead. Grace looked back, and saw where a big crack had appeared. It was constantly widening.

Then came a thunderous report. The girls screamed, and Betty almost let go of the tiller. Then she grasped it more tightly, for she saw, with a shudder of fear, that black water was now all around them.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Betty to Mollie. "Stop the boat! We're on a big cake of ice and we're floating away! Stop it!"

In an instant Mollie had lifted the wheel, and in the next she had shut of the motor. The *Spider* with the girl passengers was indeed marooned on an immense cake of ice, while all about were other cakes, grinding and smashing over one another. The river was breaking up fast.

CHAPTER XX

TO THE RESCUE

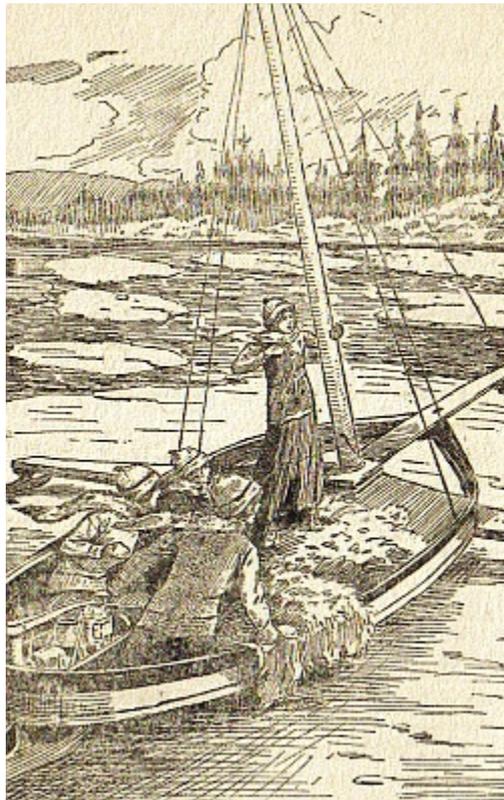
"Oh--oh!" gasped Grace, when she saw the dark and seething water all around them. "Oh, we're--afloat!"

"And it's a good thing, too!" exclaimed Betty quickly, as she squared the rudder-runner. "If we weren't afloat we'd be sinking, and I don't want to do that--it's too cold!"

Thus spoke the practical Little Captain, for she realized that now was the time to gain control over the nerves of her chums. Once they became hysterical there would be no managing them. And, as she spoke she glanced sharply at Mollie, who had opened her mouth to say something, but had thought better of it.

"But we're on a cake of--ice!" cried Amy.

"And, as the old wolf said to Little Red Riding Hood, so much the better to keep afloat with, my dear!" went on Betty gaily, a condition which she was far from feeling.



**"WE ARE ON A CAKE OF ICE, AND WE ARE
FLOATING AWAY!"**

The Outdoor Girls in a Winter Camp. Page 160.

"Yes, it's a nice big cake, too!" declared Mollie, recognizing that Betty would need help--"backing-up"--in her efforts to calm the two more timid girls. "It's a lovely large cake," Mollie added. "The largest around of any. Just suppose we were on--that?" and she pointed to one about as large as a "five cent piece the ice man brings in on a hot day," to quote Betty's later characterization.

"Oh, how can you make fun, when we may--when we may--may slip off any minute?" protested Grace, half tearfully. "Oh, why did we come out in this ice boat?"

"Now look here!" and Betty spoke sharply. "Isn't it a good deal better to be jolly than glum? Of course it is. And we're in no immediate danger. As Mollie says, we may be thankful we are not on a small cake of ice. This will hold us nicely."

"But we're floating down the stream," said Amy.

"Of course we are," agreed Betty cheerfully. "A river never stands still, you know. We are floating down with the

rest of the cakes. Pretty soon there will be an ice jam, and----"

"Oh, don't say that!" begged Grace. "An ice jam! That's one of those terrible things where so many persons are killed."

"Nonsense! You're thinking of an avalanche!" declared Mollie. "Betty means that the cakes of ice will all jam together pretty soon, when the river narrows, and we can walk ashore as nicely as you please, hauling the ice boat after us."

"Why can't we go ashore in that?" asked Amy, her face brightening.

"Because it will be so--humpy!" explained Betty. "We could not run the auto ice boat over the bumps. But really it might be worse; I'm not fooling."

Their situation was indeed peculiarly fortunate considering what had happened. The warm weather had softened the ice, and the melting of much snow had caused the river to rise. This had had the effect of cracking the covering of ice, and it had broken up. The ice boat got on a certain large section that split off and went floating down stream.

"Well, let's get out and see what we can do," proposed Mollie, as she left her place near the motor.

"Don't you dare leave this boat!" commanded Betty, a bit sternly.

"Why not?" asked Mollie, curiously.

"I'll tell you why. Though the cake we are on seems solid, there may be cracks in it, and it might separate if we stepped out on it. You see our weight would come in a comparatively small space, whereas in the boat it is distributed over a large surface."

"My? Where did you learn that?" asked Mollie, admiringly.

"In our physics class. It's true, too. We must stay here."

"How, long?" queried Grace. "It will soon be late, and----"

"You have some chocolates; haven't you?" demanded Betty, quickly.

"Yes, but----"

"Then save them. We may be here for some time, but we are bound to be taken off--sooner or later."

"And if it's later, and the cake of ice goes to pieces, no matter whether we get out on it or not, what will happen?" Amy wanted to know.

"Well, the boat contains a lot of wood, and it will float for some time--especially this cockpit part," said Betty. "Then, too, some one is sure to see us when we get down a little further. Or the boys will miss the ice boat, and, knowing that we have it out, they'll hunt for us. Especially when they see the ice breaking up."

They were slowly floating down stream--slowly because of the number of large and small cakes their own encountered. After the first alarm the girls felt more at ease, especially Amy and Grace, for, in a large measure, they had come to depend on Betty and Mollie. And these two justified the confidence reposed in them.

Eagerly they all scanned the shore of the river, but they saw no one.

"I'd even be glad to see some of the Jallows!" exclaimed Grace, after a bit. "They couldn't refuse to rescue us. Oh, I do hope papa will have no further trouble with that man! If we could only help him to straighten out the tangle!"

"We'll have to straighten out our own first," said Mollie, with a tense smile. "Do you think we are getting nearer shore, Betty?"

Betty was about to reply, when, with a sharp report, a large piece broke off their cake of ice. This left one of the runners on the forward cross-piece close to the lapping water.

"Oh dear!" cried Amy. "If this keeps up----"

"Isn't that a man over there?" suddenly cried Betty, pointing toward shore. "Yes, girls, it is. A man! Oh, shout to him! Call for help!"

The next instant there went echoing over the expanse of ice-strewn water four young voices, uniting in a call for aid.

Fortunately the wind was right, and the man heard. He had been walking along the river shore, and now, looking up and across, he saw the girls in the ice boat in their perilous position. It needed but an instant for him to sense the situation, and he acted promptly.

He waved his hand as a sign of encouragement, and his voice came faintly to the girls, but they could not make out what he said. The man ran back up the shore a little way.

"Where's he going?" asked Amy. "Oh, he's going to leave us!"

"No, he's probably gone for help!" said Betty. "Oh, there goes another piece of our floe!"

"Help! Help! Hurry!" shouted Mollie, the others joining their voices to hers.

Presently the man was seen to be pushing something down to the river.

"It's a boat!" cried Betty. "Now we're all right!" And it did seem to be some sort of boat in which the man was coming to the rescue.



CHAPTER XXI

A HELPING HAND

"What is he doing?"

"What a queer boat!"

"Sometimes it's in the water, and again it's on the ice!"

"No matter! He's coming to save us, and it's high time! There goes another chunk off our ice raft!"

It was Betty who gave voice to the last, and Grace, Amy and Mollie in turn, who had expressed the other sentiments. All were true in their way. The man did certainly seem to be advancing in a peculiar manner. At times he appeared to be rowing, or padding, and again he propelled himself over a big cake of ice, pushing himself along by means of short poles on either side of the boat.

And, as Mollie had said, at times he was in the water, and again gliding over the ice. What Betty had said was but too true. Now and then, with a startling report, the big floe on which rested the auto ice boat containing the girls would be lessened by a great chunk, that would break off, and go floating away.

"Oh, hurry! Do, please, hurry!" breathed Grace, as she sat huddled close beside Amy, gazing now and then into the ice-encumbered black water that seemed momentarily to be encroaching on their margin of safety.

"We can never all get in that boat!" decided Amy, as the man alternately pushed and paddled it toward them. "It will only hold two, and he'll have to make four trips. It may be too late--for the last one!"

"He's doing all he can," said Betty. "Perhaps the boat will hold more than you think." But, even as she said this she looked askance at the peculiar craft. Clearly it was small, and at most could hold but three. There would be danger in this even. And it would necessitate two trips at best. This delay, with the constantly-decreasing size of the floe meant danger for two of them.

"Hold on, ladies, I'm coming!!" cried the man in the boat. "I'll soon have you safe ashore. Don't jump, whatever you do, or you'll be ground to pieces by the ice cakes!"

"Cheerful prospect," remarked Betty grimly.

Amy and Grace did not try to conceal the tears in their eyes. Mollie was more like the Little Captain--brave and hopeful. Not that Grace and Amy were cowards--far from it--but they had not the buoyant reserve strength of their chums.

"Steady now, and I'll have you!" cried the man. He had come to a halt in his boat on a big swirling cake, which was keeping pace with the progress of the one containing the ice boat. "I'm going to make a line fast to you," the man explained, "and take my end ashore. Then I can haul you in. I don't dare risk taking you off in the boat. The ice is breaking up too fast. Stand by now, to catch the line I'm going to throw."

He was kneeling in his queer craft, and the girls could now see that it was made for just such work as this. It was a small punt, capable of being rowed or paddled. And to enable it to slide over the ice two strips of iron, for runners, extended along the bottom from stem to stern, just under the lower and outer edges of the boat's sides. In other words it was a combined sled and boat. It was a type much used by muskrat-hunters who have to seek their quarry on flooded meadows that often freeze over uncertainly.

"Here you go!" shouted the man. "Make this line fast to the forward part of your boat. How are the runners; well sunk in?"

"Yes!" answered Betty, glancing to make sure. The steel runners of the cross-piece of the craft, as well as the steering plates in the rear, had, because of the fact that the boat had been stationary so long, sunk deep into the soft ice. The *Spider* was firmly anchored.

"The rope will hold better on your craft, than on the ice itself," the man explained after he had thrown it. "Have you made it fast?"

"Yes!" cried Mollie, who had assisted Betty in catching the line, and taking a couple of turns about a strong cleat.

"Oh, do please hurry and--and save us!" panted Grace.

"I will, miss. Don't be skeered," said their rescuer kindly. The girls could see that he was a burly lumberman, but no one they had ever met before, as far as any of them could remember.

"I'll have you ashore soon," he added. "I'll make as good time back as I can, though it's ticklish work, for the ice is going out fast. It's early for it, too, and the river will freeze up again bad. But don't worry. Your floe will hold until I get you all ashore. Just sit tight, and don't worry!"

"But we--we can't help it," half-whispered Amy.

The man, having tossed the rope which Betty and Mollie secured, now arranged the coils in the bottom of his boat so that it would pay out without tangling.

"I was just passing when I saw your pickle," he told them. "Lucky I had the rope with me, and I knew old Muskrat Ike must have his punt hid along the bank somewhere. I routed it out and here I am. Now I'm off. Keep up your spirits!" he called with a smile.

With two short, iron shod and pointed poles he shoved his boat around and off the floe where he had halted. Into the water plunged the queer craft, and then the man paddled. He slid the shelving, pointed prow out on another ice cake and thus, alternately progressing, he neared the shore.

As he approached it, narrowly watched by the girls, who cast occasional glances at their own floe, Betty uttered a cry.

"There are the boys!"

Three figures could be seen hurrying down to the edge of the ice-filled river, and it needed but a glance to show that they were Will, Frank and Allen.

In another minute or two the lumberman, in his queer boat, had reached the shore. Out he leaped, and shoving his punt to one side he began hauling on the rope that was fast to the ice-anchored auto craft, the rope forming a slender bridge to the land. Slowly the ice-floe began to approach the shore, shoving the lesser cakes aside.

But now a new danger presented itself. As long as the big floe had gone down with the current it had not been struck hard by other chunks of ice, since all were moving at the same rate of speed. Now, as the big floe was hauled cross-ways to the current, other cakes collided with it, breaking off large chunks.

"There won't be anything left when we get ashore," cried Grace. "We're going to pieces fast!"

"Don't get excited!" advised Mollie. "We'll be all right," but she watched with eager eyes the progress they were making, and the ever-decreasing size of their floe.

"The boys are going to help him!" cried Mollie. "Now we will move faster."

Will and the others, reaching the side of the lumberman, and seeing his plan, laid hold of the rope with him, and hauled with all their might. Then, indeed, the floe containing the ice boat did move toward shore more quickly. And to such good purpose did the rescuers haul that, in a short time, the cake grounded in shallow water, with one point so near shore that the girls could leap across the intervening water safely.

And it was only just in time, for when Betty, who insisted on being the last to leave the boat, landed, the cake split in half, and the *Spider* was partly submerged.

"What luck!" cried Will, as he clasped his sister's hand. "Whatever possessed you girls to go out on a day like this?"

"Never mind asking questions now," replied Grace half-hysterically. "We're safe! Better get your boat ashore boys."

"That's good advice," agreed Allen, and with the help of the lumberman the *Spider* was hauled ashore, not in the least damaged. The girls were beginning to recover their nerves now, though they were a trifle shaky.

"Let's get back to the cabin!" cried Grace. "Oh, I'll never go ice boating again."

"Not when the ice is like it was to-day," commented her brother. "Franklin says he warned you."

"Oh, well, we didn't think we'd go so far," said Mollie. "We must thank that man. Where is he?"

The lumberman, having replaced the queer punt where he had found it, was walking away, when Betty, running after him, cried:

"Oh, won't you let us know who you are? We want to thank you, and----"

"Oh that's all right," he said, with rough good-nature. "It was all in the day's work. I've done the same thing before."

"But won't--won't you tell us who you are?" asked Allen.

"It doesn't matter. I'm a stranger around here, and I don't expect to stay. I'll be getting along," and he took off his fur cap and bowed. It was so evident that he did not want to disclose this identity that the boys did not press him.

"But we can't thank you enough," said Mollie.

"The sight of your pretty faces is enough," he replied gallantly, and with just the trace of a brogue. He smiled genially, bowed again and tramped off through the snow.

"How odd!" exclaimed Grace.

"Maybe he's one of the Jallow lumbermen, and didn't want it known that he had done the Ford family a favor," suggested Will.

"Silly!" remarked his sister.

"Well, there's something queer about him anyhow," insisted Will. "Say, but you girls were in a pickle, all right."

"It was a whole jar full--with some olives thrown in," remarked Betty. "Oh, I was so frightened!"

"You didn't show it, my dear," spoke Amy. "You were very brave!"

"Well, some one had to be. Not that you all weren't!" said Betty quickly.

"When we got back, and Franklin said you'd gone off in the boat, and we saw the ice breaking up, we were wild about you," spoke Will. "We started out to trace you, keeping on the high ground to see you quicker. But the lumberman beat us to it."

"Oh, I don't know what we should have done without him," declared Mollie.

"Well, let's get back to the cabin," voiced Will. "My feet are wet."

"And we'll all feel better for a cup of tea," added Mollie.

Behold them then, a little later, seated about a cosy fire, sipping tea, coffee or chocolate, according to their fancies, Mrs. Franklin having insisted on serving them. Soon the danger was but a poignant memory.

Days passed. The thaw spent itself and a freeze set in. Again there was excellent skating and ice boating, though the girls were a bit timid of the latter. Then came several winter affairs--parties in country-homes to which the girls were invited through the courtesy of Mrs. Franklin.

The girls enjoyed every one of them, and so did the boys. The winter was approaching its coldest spell. The Christmas holidays were not far off. Regarding the disputed claim, Mr. Jallow appeared to have matters in his favor. His men continued to cut the choice timber despite the protest of Mr. Ford, who was in despair at his inability to prove what he believed to be his right.

Alice Jallow and her friends remained in their winter cabin, but our friends saw little of them. Occasionally the boys met one another, but beyond rather frigid greetings little was said.

A big snow storm put an end to ice sports and the boys and girls went in for snowshoes, no one being very expert on them, however. One afternoon, when the boys had gone to town for some supplies, Betty proposed that the girls go for a little tramp. It was not cold, and the snow, with a heavy crust, was just right for the "tennis racquets," as she somewhat gaily dubbed the snowshoes.

They walked for several miles, and were about to turn back, when, unexpectedly they came in sight of a little cabin in a snow-filled glade.

"I wonder who lives there?" said Amy.

"Don't go too close. It may be another bear trap," said Betty with a laugh.

"That's no trap!" insisted Grace. "It's a regular cabin. I'm going to look in. Maybe an Indian used to live there, and we can find some relics."

The others rather reluctantly followed as Grace advanced. She peered in one of the windows, and, as she uttered a cry the others heard a distinct groan.

"What--what's that?" gasped Amy.

"Some one is in there! I saw a man lying in a bunk!" exclaimed Grace, moving away.

As the girls hesitated, looking at one another with fear-blانched faces, they heard a hollow voice calling:

"Help! Help! Get me a doctor!"

"Some one is hurt!" cried Betty. "We must see who it is, and help."

"But it--it's a man!" gasped Grace. "I saw him!"

"Well, a man can need help as well as anyone else," said Mollie, in defense of her chum Betty. "Come--I'm not afraid."

Resolutely she went to the front door. It opened at her touch, and the others, standing behind her saw a figure huddled up on a bunk built against the cabin wall.

"Oh, thank the dear Lord some one has come!" groaned a man's voice. "Will you please get a doctor or someone. My leg is broken, and I've been without help for two days!"

Then his voice trailed off weakly.

"He's fainted!" cried Betty, hurrying to his side.



CHAPTER XXII

THE OLD LUMBERMAN

Finding an injured man in a lonely cabin, practically snowed in, was not the only surprise the girls were to receive that day. The other followed quickly on the heels of the first. It was Mollie who "sprung it," as Will said afterward, and even Grace did not rebuke him for his slang.

Betty, followed by the others--rather timidly followed, it must be confessed--approached the bunk where the man lay. He had indeed fainted and his face was woefully white. Then Mollie cried out:

"Why it's that man--the one who rescued us from the ice floe. It's the kind lumberman!"

The others stared at her for a moment, and then looked at the burly form amid the rough blankets. A light broke over Betty's face.

"It *is* the same one!" she cried. "Oh, girls, here is a chance for us to repay him for what he did for us!"

"But what--what can we do?" asked Grace. "We can't fix his broken leg!"

"No, but we can get him something to eat--some hot coffee, and revive him. Then we can go for help!" exclaimed practical Betty. "Now, girls, the first thing to do is to build a fire, and heat some water. The doctor will want that when he comes. We'll make some coffee, too. Then we'll see what is next to be done."

The outdoor girls were used to doing things for themselves. They had not lived in their cabin a month, building fires, getting their own meals and doing practically all the hard work, for nothing. They knew how to proceed, now that there was need of haste.

Betty, looking among the stores in the cupboard, found a bottle of strong ammonia. This she carefully brought to the man's nostrils. His breathing became quicker, and soon he opened his eyes. Wonderingly he stared about him.

"What--what happened? Who are you--girls? Oh, I guess I must have keeled over. Mighty foolish of me. Oh, my leg!"

A spasm of pain shot over his face.

"Lie still," said Betty soothingly. "We will send for help. Here, drink this," and she held some water to his lips. He supported himself on his elbow, and drank greedily.

"First I had in a long time," he apologized huskily.

Mollie and Grace were making the fire, while Amy was washing out the pot, and putting some ground coffee in it. The stove was blazing well, and the kettle was put on to boil. The man drank some more water and seemed better.

"I slipped and fell coming home the other day," he explained. "I didn't think it was much more than a sprain at first, but the next morning I couldn't walk, and I knew my leg was broken. Then come this last big storm, and nobody passed here. I yelled for help until I was hoarse, but it did no good. I had about given up when you girls came along. I haven't been able to even crawl, the pain was so bad. I just had to keep covered up to prevent freezing."

"You'll soon be all right," said Betty soothingly. "We are making coffee."

"Yes, I can smell it. It's mighty good of you girls."

"You know who we are; don't you?" asked Mollie.

"I can't say as I do. The light ain't very good in here."

"Don't you remember the girls who were stranded in the ice boat; and how you pulled us to shore?"

"Oh, are you those girls? Well, land be!"

"Here is some coffee," said Betty, pouring out a fragrant cup. "I couldn't find any milk, though."

"I never use it. I like it black. You can sweeten it with molasses. You'll find some in that jug," and he indicated it. "Well, well, to think you're those girls!" he murmured as he sipped the hot beverage. Every moment he seemed to be stronger, though his pain in his leg made him wince every now and then.

"We must get a doctor for you--or send the boys," spoke Betty. "Won't you tell us who you are? So we will know how to tell the physician."

The man hesitated a moment, and looked sharply at the girls.

"I didn't aim to tell my name," he said slowly. "I didn't want it known that I had come back. But I can't see that there's any harm in telling you girls. You won't know my story, and I guess the doctor won't either. I'm Paddy Malone!"

Grace started. The name stirred half-forgotten memories.

"What!" she cried. "Paddy Malone, who used to work for Mr. Ford?"

It was the turn of the lumberman to start.

"Mr. Ford!" he exclaimed. "Do you know Mr. Ford?"

"I am his daughter," said Grace simply, "and he has been looking all over for you. He has had trouble about a lumber tract and he thinks you could straighten it out for him, and prove his claim. Are you really that Paddy Malone?"

"I am," said the man humbly, "and this is a judgment on me--a judgment on me! To think that James Ford's daughter should help me. Well, well! Yes, I am that Paddy Malone," he went on in louder tones, "and I can prove your father's claim. I'm through with that Jallow crowd, now. Through with 'em! Get a doctor, girls, if you can, and I'll tell everything when I'm fixed up. I'll prove James Ford's lumber claim for him, and show those swindlers that they can't fool Paddy Malone! I'll show 'em!"

He sank back on his pillow exhausted, while Betty made haste to bring more coffee.

CHAPTER XXIII

REVELATIONS

"And to think that we found Paddy Malone!" exclaimed Mollie.

"Yes, but he first found us--only we didn't know it," answered Grace.

They were gliding along on their snowshoes from the lonely cabin where they discovered the injured lumberman. Betty and Amy had volunteered to stay while the other girls went for the nearest doctor. There was one living half-way between the winter camp and the town.

"Papa will be so glad!" Grace went on. "I must telegraph to him right away."

"One of the boys can take in the message," suggested Mollie. "Then we can go back and hear the rest of the story. It sounds, from what Paddy Malone said, as if that Mr. Jallow had been up to some unfair tricks."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Grace. "Oh, what a lot of things have happened up here!"

"And more are going to, if I'm any judge. Your father will get his timber land back."

"Oh, how glad I'll be!"

The girls hurried on, hoping they would find the boys in their cabin. There was some doubt of this, but they were reasonably certain of locating Mr. Franklin, who would go for a doctor for the injured man.

The boys had not yet returned, but Mrs. Franklin, who listened with wonder to the story Grace and Mollie pantingly told, informed them where they could locate her husband not far off in the woods.

He was using a light sled to haul firewood, and at once set off for the doctor, whom he brought back with him in due time.

Then, in a larger sled, in which it was planned to bring back Paddy Malone to the boy's cabin, where it would be easier to nurse him, Mr. Franklin, Mollie, Grace and the physician set off for the lonely cabin.

They found Paddy much improved under the ministrations of Amy and Betty. The lumberman was quite cheerful. Telling of his determination to aid Mr. Ford seemed to have taken a load off his conscience.

With the aid of Mr. Franklin, the rather badly broken leg was set, the lumberman bearing the pain like a stoic. Then, resting on a soft bed of straw in the bottom of the sled, he was taken to the boys' cabin, the girls also riding in the big sled.

That the boys were much astonished, on their return from a little trip, to find a wounded lumberman in their cabin, is putting it mildly. And when they learned that it was the long missing Paddy Malone, who could give such valuable testimony for Mr. Ford, their astonishment knew no bounds.

"Say, you girls certainly do things!" exclaimed Will admiringly.

"They sure do!" agreed Allen, with a warm glance at Betty, who averted her eyes, and blushed, whereat Grace and Mollie nudged each other, to the further discomfiture of their friend.

"I'm just crazy to hear what he will say, and how he is going to establish daddy's boundary lines," said Grace, when the lumberman had been made comfortable.

"He must not be disturbed until to-morrow," ordered the doctor. "He has a little fever, and I want that to go down."

So the girls and boys had to curb their impatience as best they could. A telegram was sent to Mr. Ford, and he replied that he would be on hand the next day.

The morning visit of the doctor found Mr. Malone--or Paddy, as he insisted his young friends call him--so much better that the physician said:

"You may tell your story now, but don't talk too much."

"Sure, and I'll leave that for the ladies!" exclaimed Paddy with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Now everybody keep quiet and listen," said Grace, when she had related how she and her chums had come to the

winter camp, and how Mr. Jallow and his company had encroached on land that Mr. Ford believed was his own.

"And it *is* his!" exclaimed Paddy. "The boundary lines have been changed. I can see that myself. It's that Jallow's work. Listen and I'll tell you how it happened.

"As your father says, Miss," he went on, turning to Grace, "I was with him when the survey was made, and stone piles put up and the trees blazed to mark the line. That valuable strip was on his side. Then some time passed, and that cunning fox, Jallow, came to me, and he represented that he had been wrongly dealt with. He said Mr. Ford had sold out his interests to strangers who were going to do harm to Jallow and his friends.

"Not knowing any different, I believed him. He said the courts would not give him justice and he was going to take it himself, and I had small blame for him for doing that. I'd do the same. But mind you," Paddy insisted, "I did not know I was doing my friend James Ford any harm.

"Jallow said he would pay me just to disappear for a time, and, foolishly, I consented. I went out of the country, and for a while Jallow sent me, and a friend of mine, money. My friend knew the proper boundaries, too.

"Then the money stopped, and I came on to find out why. Jallow only laughed at me, and said he had no further use for me, as he'd got all he wanted. I didn't know what to do. I stayed around here, keeping in hiding, for I feared maybe I could be arrested for what I did. That was why I didn't give you my name," and he smiled at the girls.

"So I came to this old cabin I used to own, to see what would turn up. Sure and it was myself turned up--slipped up--and broke my leg. That was what turned up.

"But before that I had seen all I wanted to--that was the changed boundary lines. Then I knew Jallow's game. He wanted to throw that valuable timber strip into his own land. I made some inquiries, and found that Mr. Ford still owned the lumber camp, and hadn't sold out, as Jallow told me. Then I knew I had been fooled, but still I didn't know what to do, for I was afraid of arrest, and I never could stand jail, when I knew I hadn't really meant any wrong.

"I saw Jallow again, but he only laughed at me, and give me a little money to get out of the country. But I didn't go then, and I'm not going now. I'm going to see justice done!"

"And I think I can assure you that you will not suffer for it," said Allen Washburn, with a glance at Will and Grace. "Mr. Ford will be here soon, and you can arrange everything with him."

"I hope he'll forgive me," remarked Paddy somewhat mournfully.

"I'm sure he will," declared Grace, warmly.

Paddy Malone went more into details of how he had been induced to disappear so that the proper boundaries might be shifted to make it appear that the valuable land was on Mr. Jallow's side, instead of belonging to Mr. Ford. Then Dr. Burke insisted that his patient have rest, so the boys and girls went outside to talk it over.

"Oh, I do wish papa would come!" sighed Grace.

In due time Mr. Ford arrived at the camp, a very much surprised but pleased lawyer indeed. He had a consultation with Paddy, who confirmed all he had said and furnished the address of a companion who was present when the proper survey was made.

Mr. Ford then made his plans, but, as he needed the help of Paddy in carrying them out, it was decided to postpone action until the lumberman could get around--on crutches, at least.

Mr. Ford stayed a day or so in camp with his daughter and her friends, going about to look at the various boundaries, and arranging certain details with Ted Franklin. He was entertained by the young people, and seemed to enjoy himself.

He did not go near the strip in dispute, however, preferring to wait until he was ready with his plans. Paddy was slowly getting better, and Mr. Ford went back to Deepdale, to look after matters there, arranging to come back as soon as Paddy could limp around.

Meanwhile the young people made the most of their life in the great wintry woods, for they were to return home for the Christmas holidays, as school would open the first of the new year.

There were sleigh-rides, coasting, skating occasionally, and some more ice boating, though, because of considerable snow, the latter sport was rather curtailed.

Occasionally Mr. Blackford came out for a day or so, but he had no good news regarding his missing sister. He had

followed several clues unsuccessfully.

"But somehow, in spite of all my disappointments, I feel that I will be successful before long," he affirmed.

"We hope so," replied Amy, gently, and the others echoed her words.

Then came a day when Paddy could limp about. He was a happy man, and, in answer to a telegram sent him with this news, Mr. Ford returned word that he would come up and assist at the "last act in the lumber play," as Will called it.

Accompanied by a court officer, and with Allen Washburn as consulting attorney, Grace's father reached the camp one evening.

"Do you think you can stand it to face Jallow to-morrow, Paddy?" he asked.

"I'm sure I can. I'm thinkin' he won't face me, though."

"Maybe not. We'll see. Well, we'll go over and take possession of the disputed strip in the morning."

The court officer and Allen nodded.

"May we come along, Daddy, and see the fun?" asked Grace.

"Well," replied her father, "I don't know as there will be much fun, but--yes, you may be there."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LYNX

Over the snow to where, according to Ted Franklin, the Jallow lumbermen had last been seen cutting the valuable timber, went Mr. Ford and his little party, including the boys and girls. There was eager anticipation in their demeanor.

"What do you suppose your father will do?" asked Mollie of Grace, as they rode along in the big sled, for, out of consideration of Paddy's leg, they rode instead of walked.

"I don't know," was the answer. "But I guess daddy has his plans all made."

"I just hope that Alice Jallow sees how we come out ahead!" went on Mollie, half-vindictively.

"Mollie!" reproached Betty, gently.

"I don't care. She--she's a--cat!"

Mr. Ford, Paddy and Allen were consulting with the court officer, Will and Frank were discussing a prospective hunting trip, and the girls were planning Christmas surprises as the sled slid on.

"Here's the new line," said Paddy, as they came to a pile of stones. "And there's where it ought to be," he added, as they drove across the valuable strip in dispute. There was a difference of nearly a mile.

"That is my recollection of it," said Mr. Ford. "Owing to the death of the surveyor, and the destruction of some of his records, I was unable to prove it, though."

"Well, you can now," retorted Paddy, significantly.

Soon they heard the sound of axes and, in answer to a nod from Mr. Ford, the horses were turned in that direction.

Suddenly from behind a tree stepped the burly form of Hank Smither.

"You can't go any further!" he growled. "Turn back an' git off this land! You're trespassin'!"

"Oh, I think not," said Mr. Ford, pleasantly.

"Well, I tell you you be! Git off, 'fore I----"

"Now I advise you to go slow, my big friend," put in the constable. "I'm from the court, and I have authority in this matter that goes above even Jallow's."

"All I know is that my orders is not to let any one on here exceptin' Mr. Jallow's men," growled Hank.

"Where is Mr. Jallow?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Over there," and Hank pointed.

"Then we'll settle with him. Drive on, Ted."

"I don't see how I kin let ye!" whined Hank. He had lost much of his bluster now.

"You don't have to let us. We'll do it without, Hank!" spoke Paddy, suddenly. At the sound of his voice--for up to now Hank had not seen the lumberman--the burly guard started slightly.

"Paddy Malone!" he gasped. "You back!"

"Yes, and I guess Jallow won't be any more glad to see me than you are," was the grim comment.

There was no further hindrance to their progress. The sound of chopping grew louder, and a little later the sled turned into a clearing, about which were strewn many big, fallen trees. Mr. Ford's eyes sparkled at the sight.

"They haven't hauled out much of my timber," he said. "We are just in time!"

A man came running from a group. He held up a warning hand.

"You'll have to get out of here!" he cried.

"Who says so?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Mr. Jallow sent me to tell you."

"Well, you tell Mr. Jallow to come here himself. We want to see him."

The man hesitated a minute and then set off on the run.

"Here comes Jallow now," observed Will.

"Oh, I hope there won't be any trouble," murmured Amy.

"Don't worry," said Mr. Blackford, who sat beside her.

"Here, what do you want?" blustered Mr. Jallow, as he came up. "Oh, it's you; is it, Ford? Well, you haven't any more right here than any one else. Get off. This is my land--the courts have awarded it to me."

"Under a misapprehension--yes. Because of false boundary lines--yes, Jim Jallow!"

"Who says the boundary lines are false?"

"I do!" cried Paddy Malone, standing up in the sled, and leaning on his crutch. "I say the lines were changed, Jim Jallow, and you know it! I saw the right marks put, but they were shifted, and I'm ready to testify that you paid me to keep out of the country while you changed 'em."

"That isn't so!" stormed Jallow. "Who would believe you?" but he paled, and was obviously ill at ease.

"I guess they'll believe me when Mr. Ford and Dick Norbury testify to the same thing," said Paddy, coolly.

"Dick Norbury--why, he's--dead!" gasped Jallow.

"Not much!" cried Paddy. "He's very much alive, and I've got a letter from him in my pocket now, saying he'll come on any time he's wanted and testify as to the right boundaries."

Mr. Jallow stood with open mouth. As the saying goes, all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"I guess you had better give up, Mr. Jallow," said the court officer. "I'm here to take charge of this land until the matter is officially settled. In the meanwhile no more trees must be cut. That is a court order, and here is a copy of it. I serve it on you, and violation of it means contempt, with heavy penalties."

"The jig is up, Jim!" cried Paddy. "I told you I'd get even with you!"

Mr. Jallow said not another word. He was beaten at every point, and he knew it. His men crowded up around him.

"Shall we go on cutting?" asked the foreman.

Mr. Jallow hesitated a moment.

"No," he said, in a low voice. "Better stop--I guess."

"I may want you men to work for me," put in Mr. Ford. "I intend to go on cutting this tract, as soon as the court formalities are over. If you like you may remain in camp until it is time to go to work again. I'll hire you."

A cheer greeted this announcement. The men had looked rather blank at losing their work in the middle of winter.

"Well, it's all over," said Grace, as the sled turned homeward. "And it wasn't so terrible; was it, Amy?"

"No, indeed. Oh, I'm so glad your father has won, dear."

"I guess we all are," spoke Betty. "Now we can enjoy the rest of our stay in camp without having to worry, and we can go where we please. Can you stay, Mr. Blackford?"

"Yes, for a few days more."

The court formalities did not take long, and soon the title of Mr. Ford to the disputed land was confirmed. The change in boundary lines was shown, and, had he so desired, Mr. Ford could have proceeded against Mr. Jallow. But he preferred not to, since he had not really lost any of the valuable timber.

"Besides, there is no use making Alice feel any worse than she does," said Grace. The Jallow camp had been broken up, since it was on Mr. Ford's land, and Alice, her mother and guests had gone back to Deepdale. Our friends held undisputed sway in the woods.

Christmas was approaching. There was but about a week more in the woods, when, one fine warm day--that is, warm for that time of year--the party of young people set off for a tramp in the forest.

By twos and threes they strolled on, until finally Amy and Mr. Blackford found themselves in rather a lonely part of the woods, separated from the others.

"I guess we had better be getting back," he observed with a smile. "They may be anxious about us."

"Yes," agreed Amy. "But it is so wonderful here--in the winter woods. I feel I could stay--forever!"

They walked along a narrow path. There was a movement in the trees over their heads.

"What is that?" asked Amy, suddenly.

"A bird, I guess. Did you think it was a bear?"

Amy did not answer at once. Then she screamed as the grayish body of some animal with curiously tufted ears, sprang from an overhanging branch straight at her.

Mr. Blackford, who was carrying a heavy cudgel, turned quickly at the sound of Amy's voice, and pulled her to one side. He was not altogether successful, for the keen claws of the lynx grazed Amy's shoulder, tearing through her coat and dress, ripping off the sleeves and leaving her arm exposed to the shoulder, a slight scratch, through even the thicknesses of cloth, bringing blood.

With a snarl the beast turned as though to repeat the attack, but Mr. Blackford brought down the cudgel on its head with such force that the brute turned with a shrill cry of pain and fled.

Then the young man, who had caught the almost fainting girl in his other arm, turned his attention to her.

"Amy--Amy!" he cried. "Are you hurt? Speak and tell me!"

Slowly she opened her eyes. The blood came back into her cheeks, that paled again at the sight of the crimson mark on her arm.

"It is only a scratch--not deep," said Mr. Blackford, reassuringly. "The brute leaped to one side. It must have been desperate to spring on you that way."

"What was it?" asked Amy, weakly.

"A lynx--a fierce sort of beast. Wait, I will bind up your arm," and he drew out his handkerchief.

As he was winding the linen about the cut he started. A queer look came over his face. He stared at a mark--a strange red mark--on her shoulder.

"That--that!" stammered Mr. Blackford. "How did you come by that mark, Amy?"

He stood holding her arm--her arm whence the sleeves had been ripped, and the young man was gazing with fascinated eyes at a peculiar star-shaped mark in deep red imprinted on the white flesh. In red it matched the ruddy hue of the blood drawn by the lynx.

"Tell me," he said, hoarsely, "how did that mark come there?"

"It is a birth mark," said Amy, slowly. "It has always been there. But why--why do you question me so? Why do you look at me so strangely?"

"Because, Amy, there may be something providential in this. Because you--you may be my--sister!"

"Your sister!" She started as though to pull away from him, but he held her arm, continuing to gaze at the red mark.

"Yes," he answered. "Wait. I must make sure this time. I have a drawing of it. Let me compare it, please. You are not cold?"

"No." Amy was pale, but her heart was pumping blood through her veins at such a rapid rate that it seemed as if she would never be cold again. The flow of blood from the scratches made by the beast had somewhat lessened.

From his pocket Mr. Blackford drew a paper. Amy could see that it contained a drawing--an outline in red ink. The young man compared this with the mark on her shoulder--a mark at which she had often wondered herself.

"It is the same--the very same," he murmured. "The same shape, the same size, and in the same place. There can be

no doubt of it, I think. Amy, you must be--my sister!"

"But--but," she stammered, "you said your sister had a 'V' shaped mark on her arm, just above the elbow. Now you--"

"I know I said that, but it was a mistake. Or, rather, that was not the real identifying mark. The people on whom I relied did not send me all the information they had.

"My missing sister did have a mark on her arm--a mark shaped like a 'V,' but it is not a birth mark. It was caused by the sharp point of a hot flatiron when she was a child. But the main identifying mark is this red one on the shoulder. You have it! Everything tallies with the new information I have."

"But you never said anything to us about this," spoke Amy, wonderingly.

"I know it. I thought I had inflicted enough of my family troubles on you girls. I kept quiet about this. I determined to say nothing. But now, when I saw this mark on you, I was sure. There can be no mistake. Oh, Amy!" and his eyes filled with tears of joy.

"I--I hope there is no mistake," she faltered. "I--perhaps it will be well to say nothing to the others about it--just yet."

"Perhaps. I will have further inquiries made, and then I will let you know. Poor Amy! Does it pain you very much?" and he touched her arm gently.

"No, hardly any, now."

"I will bind it up, and we will go back. Oh, Amy, I hope--I pray that it may turn out you are my sister. I--I want you so much."

"And I hope so, too," she said.

The scratched arm was bandaged, and the torn sleeves adjusted as well as could be. Then the two, upon whom Fate had payed such a strange trick, walked back.

"I had some hopes, when you first mentioned a birth mark," said Amy, "that mine might prove to be the one you were looking for, but when you spoke of one near the elbow I knew it could not be. This scar, which does somewhat resemble a 'V,' was not a birth mark, though."

"No, and that threw us all off. But I did not then know of the mistake having been made. I only learned differently the other day, but I kept silent about it. There had been disappointments enough. But when I saw that mark on your shoulder, it came to me in a rush. Amy, you must be my sister!"

"I--I hope I am!"

"But we will wait and make sure."

To this she agreed. Of course they showed their excitement when they joined the others--a double excitement--but the story of the lynx was excuse enough for that, and no embarrassing questions were asked. Amy was hurried back to the cabin to have her arm dressed properly.

CHAPTER XXV

CHRISTMAS JOYS

They were gathered about a big fire on the hearth in the largest cabin--the outdoor girls, the boys, Mr. Ford and others. The crackling blaze leaped up the broad-throated chimney--it snapped with the energy of Fourth of July pyrotechnics, and threw a ruddy glow on happy faces. Betty sang:

"Merry, merry Christmas, everywhere,
Cheerily it ringeth through the air.
Christmas bells, Christmas trees,
Christmas odors on the breeze.
Merry, merry Christmas, everywhere,
Cheerily it ringeth through the air!"

The others joined in, and then, clasping hands they circled around the room, their shadows flickering in fantastic and gigantic shapes on the wall as the fire danced with them.

"It's going to be the best Christmas ever--the very best ever!" murmured Amy, shyly, as she sat beside her--brother.

"That's right, little girl," he said, patting her arm, the one torn by the lynx. But he took good care to pat above the scratch, which had been bandaged.

For there was now no doubt that Amy and Mr. Blackford were brother and sister. Following the strange revelation to him of the red mark on her shoulder, the young business man had caused careful inquiries to be made. There was no mistake this time. The baby picked up in the flood had the red mark--Mr. Blackford's missing sister had the red mark, and so had Amy. They were one and the same. This was sufficiently proved.

And if other identification was needed, it was in the scar near Amy's elbow--a scar which at one time she hoped would prove a means of identifying her. And it did in a measure.

For the mark was that made by the hot point of a flatiron. One had fallen on her when she was a baby, making a bad burn that had healed over in the course of time. This fact regarding Amy was learned from the old diary found with her on the raft in the flood. And from another and independent source it was learned that Mr. Blackford's missing sister had a similar scar, caused by a like accident. Though years had almost obliterated it, still it was sufficiently plain.

"They can't get you away from me now, Amy," said Mr. Blackford, proudly.

"I won't let them," added Amy, moving closer to him.

"Pass the chocolates, Sis," ordered Will. "What is Christmas without candy?"

"Oh! to think of all the good luck we've had since we came to the winter camp!" cried Grace, as she complied. "Papa gets his land back----"

"Because you girls were lucky enough to discover the missing witness," interrupted Mr. Ford.

"Then Amy finds her brother," Grace went on, "and----"

"All because a lynx happened to jump down out of a tree to bite her!" cried Will, gaily.

"And then--and then----" mused Grace.

"Oh, here is a package that came by express for you to-day!" broke in Mollie. "It's marked chocolates, but----"

"Please give it to me!" cried Grace. "I was wondering what had become of it."

"That will keep her quiet for a while," said Will.

It was three days after the sensational developments related in the preceding chapter. Mr. Blackford, recognizing the peculiar mark on Amy's arm, tentatively decided she was his long-missing sister, and a reference to the documents, as well as a communication with Mr. and Mrs. Stonington, bore this out. Amy was not the relative of the Deepdale Stoningtons. There had been a mix-up in the babies rescued from the flood, and, as far as could be learned on hasty inquiry, the child of Mrs. Stonington's relative had disappeared.

"But I've got folks at last--real folks, even if it is only one," said Amy, with a loving look at her brother, who regarded her affectionately.

"You are a lucky girl," whispered Mollie, with a look at Mr. Blackford--Henry they all called him now, since he was found to be related to one of the outdoor girls.

"And my name is Blackford--not Stonington," Amy went on. "I will feel strange at first, but I can get used to it."

"And to-morrow we'll go home for Christmas," said Betty, after a pause. "Well, of course it will be nice in Deepdale, but we have had some glorious times here; haven't we, girls?"

"We have!" they all chorused--boys included.

They had indulged in their last skating race at camp, and taken a final trip in the ice boat, the boys had voted to go home in the odd motor craft, but the girls were to go by train, starting in the morning.

"And now, one last song," suggested Betty. "All has ended well and happily from the finding of Amy's brother to the regaining of Mr. Ford's land. One last song!"

They sang a Christmas carol, and then, in order to be up early, they went to bed soon afterward.

"Well, I wonder what will be next?" asked Mollie, as she bade Betty good-night. "Can you imagine anything else happening to us?"

"I don't know," answered Betty, reflectively. "There are many more things that *might* happen."

And what they were will be related in the next volume of this series, which will be entitled: "The Outdoor Girls in Florida; Or, Wintering in the Sunny South." There we shall meet our old friends again in the land of oranges and magnolias, and learn how they saw unusual sights in the wilds of the interior.

"You must wake and call me early, call me early, Mollie dear, for soon it will be Christmas, the best time of all the year." Thus chanted Will next morning under the window of the cabin occupied by the outdoor girls. But the girls were already up, and packing.

Ted Franklin was to be left in charge of the camp, and the valuable timber strip so fortunately restored to Mr. Ford. Paddy Malone was to be foreman of the new cutting gang, many of Mr. Jallow's employes hiring out to Grace's father. The Jallows had gone back to Deepdale, as I have said, the case against Mr. Jallow being dropped.

"See you later!" called the girls to the boys, as the latter prepared to go home in the auto ice boat. And as good-byes were called, the eyes of Amy rested longest on the face of her newly-found brother. There was to be a new life before her--she felt sure. A new and more happy life.

And now that matters have turned out so well, we will take leave of the Outdoor Girls.

THE END

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