

Norton Carol

The Phantom Yacht



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CHAPTER I

FRIENDS PARTED

The face of Dories Moore was as dismal as the day was bright. It was Indian summer and the maple trees under which she was hurrying were joyfully arrayed in red and gold, while crimson, yellow and purple flowers nodded at her from the gardens that she passed with unseeing eyes. She was almost blinded with tears; her scarlet tam was awry, as though she had put it on hurriedly, and her sweater coat, of the same cheerful hue, was unbuttoned and flapping as she fairly ran down the village street. In her hand was a note which had been the cause of the tears and the haste. On it were a few penciled words:

“Dori dear, we are leaving sooner than we expected. I’m sending this to you by little Johnnie-next-door. Do come right over and say good-bye to someone who loves you best of all.

“Your sister-friend,

“Nann.”

At a large old colonial house at the edge of the town, just

where the meadows began, the girl turned in at a lilac-guarded gate and hurried up the neatly graveled walk. Her eyes were again brimming with tears as she glanced up at the curtainless windows that looked as dismal and deserted as she felt. Hurrying up the steps, she lifted the quaintly carved old iron knocker and shuddered as she heard the sound echoing uncannily through the big unfurnished rooms. Her sensitive mouth quivered when she heard the sound of running feet on bare floors and when the door was flung open by another girl of about the same age, Dori leaped in and, throwing her arms about her friend, she burst into tears.

“Why, Dories! Dear, dear Dori, don’t cry so hard.” There were sudden tears in the warm brown eyes of Nann Sibbett, as for a moment she held her friend tenderly close.

“One might think that I was going a million miles away.” She tried to speak cheerfully. “Boston isn’t so very far from Elmwood and some day, soon, I am sure that you will be coming to visit me.”

An April-like smile flickered tremulously on the lips of the younger girl as she stepped back and straightened her tam. “Well, that is something to look forward to,” she confessed. “It will be a little strip of silver lining to as black a cloud as ever came into my life. Of course,” Dories amended, “losing father was terrible, but I was too young to know the loneliness of it, and being poor when we should be rich is awfully hard. Sometimes I feel so rebellious, O, nobody knows how rebellious I feel. But losing one’s money is nothing compared to losing one’s only friend.”

The other girl, who was taller by half a head, actually laughed. “Why, Dories Moore, here you talk as though you would not have a single friend left when I have moved away. There isn’t a girl at High who hasn’t been green with envy because I have had the good fortune to be your best friend ever since we were in kindergarten, and just as soon as I’m out of town they’ll be swarming around you, each one aspiring to be your pal.”

There was a scornful curl on the sensitive lips of the listener. “As though I would let anyone have your place, Nann Sibbett. Never, never, never, not if I live to be a thousand years old.” Then with an appealing upward glance, “But you’ll probably like some city girl heaps better than you ever did me. I suppose you’ll forget all about me soon.”

“Silly!” Nann exclaimed brightly, giving her friend an impulsive hug. “Don’t you remember when you were eleven and I was twelve, we had a ceremony out in the meadow under the twin elms and we vowed, just as solemnly as we knew how, that we would be adopted sisters and that real born sisters could not be closer.”

Dories nodded, smiling again at the pleasant recollection. “Do you know, Nann,” she put in, “I sort of feel that we were intended to be sisters some way. It was such a strange coincidence that our birthdays happened to fall on the same day, the third of September.”

“Maybe if they hadn’t,” Nann chimed in, “you and I wouldn’t have been best friends at all, for, don’t you remember, way back

in kindergarten days, you were so shy you didn't make friends with anyone, and when Miss Sally wanted to find a seat for you that very first morning, she chose me because it was our birthday. After that, since I was a year older, I felt that I ought to look out for you just as a big sister really should."

Dories nodded, then as she glanced into the bare library, in the wide doorway of which they were standing, she said dismally, "O, Nann, what good times we've had in this room. I can almost see now when we were very little girls curled up on that window seat near the fireplace studying our first primer, and on and on until last June when we were cramming for our sophomore finals."

"I know." Nann looked wistfully toward the corner which Dories had indicated. "I don't believe we will either of us know how to study alone." Then, fearing that tears would come again, she caught her friend's hand as she exclaimed, "Dories dear, this room is too full of ghosts of our past. Let's go out in the garden. Dad had to go to the bank to finish up some business, and I had to stay here to see that the last load of furniture got off safely. It left just before you came. We're going to store it for a time and live in a very fine hotel in Boston. Won't that be a lark for a change?"

Dories spoke bitterly, "Well, for one thing I *am* thankful, and that is that your father didn't lose his money the way my father did, though how it happened I never knew and mother never told me."

"Maybe it will all come back some time in a manner just as mysterious," her friend said cheerfully as she led her down the

steps around the house. Neither of the girls spoke of Nann's dear mother, who had so recently died, and whose passing had made life in the old house unendurable to the daughter and her father, but they were both thinking of her as they wandered into the garden which she had so loved. Nann slipped an arm about her friend as she paused to look at the blossoms.

"Autumn flowers are always so bright and cheerful, aren't they, Dori?" She was determined to change the younger girl's dismal trend of thought. "That bed of scarlet salvia over by the evergreen hedge seems to be just rejoicing about something, and the asters, of almost every color, look as though they were dressed for a party. They're happy, if we aren't."

"Stupid things!" Doris said petulantly. "They don't know or care because you, who have tended and watered and loved them, are going away forever and ever."

"Yes, they do know," Nann said, smiling a bit tremulously, "for last night when I came out to give them a drink, I told them all about it, but they're just trying to make the best of it. They know it's as hard for me to go away from my old home as it is for them to have me go, but they're trying to make it easier for me, I guess."

Doris flashed a quick glance up at her companion. Then, impulsively, "Oh, Nann, how selfish I always am! Of course it's hard for you to leave your old home and go among strangers. Here all the time I've just been thinking how *hard* it is for *me* to have you go." Then, making a little bow toward the bed of radiant

asters, the girl of many moods called to them: "You're setting a good example, you little plant folk in your bright blossom tams. From now on I'll be just as cheerful as ever I can." Smiling up at her companion, Doris exclaimed, "And all this time I've had some news that I haven't told you." Answering verbally her friend's questioning look, she hurried on, "I'm going away myself for the month of October. At least I suppose I am, and that's one of the things that has made me so dismally blue." Nann stopped in the garden path which they had been slowly circling and gazed into the pretty face of her friend, hardly knowing whether to congratulate or condole. Instead of doing either, she queried, "But why are you so dismal about it, Dori? I've often heard you say that you did wish you could see something of the world beyond Elmwood?"

"I know it and I still should wish it if you were going with me, but this journey is anything but pleasant to anticipate."

"Do tell me about it. I'm consumed with curiosity." Nann drew her friend to a garden seat and sat with an arm holding her close. "Now start at the beginning. *Who* are you going with, where and why?" The question, simple as it seemed, brought tears with a rush to the violet-blue eyes of the younger girl, but remembering her recent resolve, she sat up ramrod-straight as she replied, making her mouth into as hard a line as she could. "The one I am going with is an old crab of a great-aunt whom I have never seen. I'm ever so sure she is a crab, although my angel mother always smooths over that part of her nature when she's telling me about

her. She's rich as Cræsus, if that fabled person really was rich. I'm never very sure about those things."

Nann laughed. "He was! You're safe in your comparison. But he got much of his money by taking it away from other people with the cruel taxes he levied."

"Oh, well, of course my Great Aunt Jane isn't so terribly rich," Dories modified, "but Mother said she had plenty for every comfort and luxury, and what's more, Mums *did* agree with *me* when I said that she must be queer. That is, Mother said that even my father, who was Great-Aunt Jane's own nephew, couldn't understand her ways." Then, with eyes solemn-wide, the narrator continued: "Nann Sibbett, as I've often told you, I don't understand in the least what became of our inheritance. If Mother knows, she won't tell, but I'm suspicious of that crabby old Aunt Jane. I think she has it. There now, that's what I think."

Nann was interested and said so. "But, Dori dear, you've sidetracked. You began by saying that you were going somewhere. I take it that your Great-Aunt Jane has invited you to go somewhere with her. Is that right?"

"It is!" the other girl said glumly. "But, believe me, I don't look forward to the excursion with any great pleasure." Then she hurried on. "Think of it, Nann, that awful old lady has actually requested that I spend the whole dismal month of October with her down on the beach at some lonely isolated place called Siquaw Point."

But if Dories expected sympathy, she was disappointed. "Oh,

Dori!” was the excited exclamation that she heard, “I know about Siquaw Point. An aunt of mine went there one summer, and she just raved about the rocky cliffs, the sand dunes and the sea. I’d love it, I know, even in the middle of winter, and, dear, sometimes October is a beautiful month. You may have a wonderful time.”

But Doris refused to see any hope of happiness ahead. “The Garden of Eden would be a dismal place to me if I had to be alone in it with my Great-Aunt Jane.”

Nann laughed, then hearing a siren calling from the front, she sprang up, held out both hands to her friend as she exclaimed, “There’s my chauffeur-dad waiting to bear me stationward, but, dear, I’ve thought of one thing that will help some. To get to Siquaw Point you will have to go through Boston. If you’ll let me know the day and the hour I’ll be at the station to speed you on your way.”

How the younger girl’s face brightened. “Nann, darling,” she exclaimed, “will you truly? Then that will give me a chance to see you again in just a few weeks, maybe only two, for its nearly October now.”

“Righto!” was the cheerful reply. “There’s that siren again. I must go. Will you come and say good-bye to Dad?”

But the other girl shook her head, her eyes brimming with tears. “I’d rather not now. You tell him for me. I’m going home across lots. I don’t want anyone to see how near I am to crying.” As she spoke two tears splashed down her cheeks. Nann caught

her in a close embrace. “Dear, dear sister-friend,” she said, “I’m going to be just as lonely as you are.” Then, stooping, she picked an aster and held it out, saying brightly, “This golden aster wants to go with you to tell you that we’re going to be as cheerful as we can, come what may. See you next month, Dori, sure as sure.”

Nann turned at the corner of the house to wave, and then Doris walked slowly across lots thinking over the conversation she had had with her dearly loved friend. She paused a moment under the twin elms where, in the long ago, they had vowed to be loyal as any two sisters could be. Then, with a deep sigh, she went on to the cosy brown house under other spreading elms that she called home.

CHAPTER II

BANISHING GHOSTS

There was a cheerful bustle in the kitchen when Dories opened the side door. Her mother was preparing the noon meal with her customary wordless song, although now and then a merry message to the frail boy, who so often sat in a low chair near the stove, was sung to the melody. Just then the newcomer heard the lilted announcement: "Footsteps I hear, and now will appear my very dear little daughter."

Dories was repentant. "Oh, Mother, if I haven't stayed out too late again, and you've had to stop your sewing to get lunch."

Little Peter paused in his whittling long enough to remark, "Dori, you've been crying. What for?"

But a tactful mother shook her head quickly at the small boy, saying brightly, "O, I was glad to stop sewing and stretch a bit. That brocade dress is hard to work on. I don't know how many machine needles it has broken. But since it belongs to a rich person she won't mind paying for them."

After putting the golden aster in a vase, Dories snatched her apron from its hook in the closet and put it on with darkening looks. "Mother Moore," she threatened, "if you don't go and lie down on the lounge until lunch is ready, I'm not going to let you sew a single bit more today. It's just terribly wicked, and all

wrong somehow, that you have to make dresses for other women to keep us alive when my very own father's very own Aunt Jane is simply rolling in wealth, and – ”

“Tut! Tut! Little firefly!” Her mother laughingly shook a stirring spoon in her direction. “If you had ever seen your stately old Aunt Jane, you just couldn't conceive of her rolling in anything. That would be much too undignified.”

“But, Mother, you know I meant that figuratively, not literally. She is rich and we are poor. Now I ask you what right has one member of a family to have all that his heart desires and another to have to sew for a living.”

Little Peter tittered: “It's *her* heart, if it's Great-Aunt Jane you're talking about.” A sharp retort was on the girl's lips when her mother said cheerily, “Now, kiddies, let's talk about something else. Mrs. Doran sent us over a whole pint of cream. Shall we have it whipped on those last blackberries that Peter found this morning out in Briary Meadow, or shall I make a little biscuit shortcake?”

“Shortcake! Shortcake! I want shortcake!” Peter sang out.

“But, Mother, you're too tired to make one,” Doris protested.

“Then you make it, Dori,” Peter pleaded.

“You know I couldn't make a biscuit shortcake, Peter Moore, not if my life depended on it.” The girl was in a self-accusing mood. “I never learned how to do anything useful.” Doris was putting the pretty lunch dishes on a small table in the kitchen corner breakfast-nook as she talked.

The understanding mother, realizing the conflicting emotions that were making her young daughter so unhappy, brought out the flour and other ingredients as she said, "Never too late to learn, dear. Come and take your first lesson in biscuit-making."

Half an hour later, as they sat around the lunch table, Dories told as much of her recent conversation with her best friend as she wished to share. Then they had the blackberry shortcake and real cream, and even Peter acknowledged that it was "most as good as Mother's."

When the kitchen had been tidied and Peter had gone to his little upper room for the nap that was so necessary for the regaining of his health, Dories went into the small sewing room which formerly had been her father's den and stood looking discontentedly out of the window. Her mother had resumed sewing on the rich brocaded dress. When the hum of the machine was stilled, she glanced at the pensive girl and said: "Dori dear, this is the first afternoon that I can remember, almost, that you have been at home with me. You and Nann always went somewhere or did something. You are going to miss your best friend ever so much, I know, but – " there was a break in the voice which caused the girl to turn and look inquiringly at her mother, who was intently pressing a seam, and who finished her sentence a bit pathetically, "it's going to mean a good deal to me, daughter, to have your companionship once in a while."

With a little cry the girl sprang across the room and knelt at her mother's side, her arms about her. "O, Mumsie, was there ever

a more selfish girl? I don't see how you have kept on loving me all these years." Then her pretty face flushed and she hesitated before confessing: "I hate to say it, for it only shows how truly horrid I am, but I liked to be over at Nann's, where the furniture was so beautiful, not threadbare like ours." She was looking through the open door into the living-room, where she could see the old couch with its worn covering. "I ought to have stayed at home and helped you with your sewing, but I will from now on."

The mother, knowing that tears were near, put a finger beneath the girl's chin and looked deep into the repentant violet blue eyes. Kissing her tenderly, she said merrily, "Very well, young lady, if you wish to punish yourself for past neglects, sit over there in my low rocker and take the bastings out of this skirt."

Dories obeyed and was soon busy at the simple task. To change the subject, her mother spoke of the planned trip. "It will be your very first journey away from Elmwood, dear. At your age I would have been ever so excited."

The girl looked up from her work, a cloud of doubt in her eyes. "Oh, Mother, do you really think that you would have been, if you were going to a summer resort where the cottages were all shut up tight as clams, boarded up, too, probably, and with such a queer, grumpy person as Great-Aunt Jane for company?" The girl shuddered. "Every time I think of it I feel the chills run down my back. I just know the place will be full of ghosts. I won't sleep a wink all the time I'm there. I'm convinced of that."

Her mother's merry laugh was reassuring. "Ghosts, dearie?" she queried, glancing up. "Surely you aren't in earnest. You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

"Well, maybe not, exactly, but there are the queerest stories told about those lonely out-of-the-way places. You know that there are, Mother. I don't mean made-up stories in books. I mean real newspaper accounts."

"But it doesn't matter what kind of paper they're printed on, Dori," her mother put in, more seriously, "nothing could make a ghost story true. The only ghosts that haunt us, really, are the memories of loving words left unsaid and loving deeds that were not done, and sometimes," she concluded sadly, "it is too late to ever banish those ghosts." Then, not wishing to depress her already heart-broken daughter, she said in a lighter tone, "After all, why worry about your visit to Siquaw Point, when, as yet, you haven't heard that your Great-Aunt Jane has really decided to go. I expected a letter every day last week, but none came, so she may have given up the plan for this year." Then, after glancing up at the clock, she added, "Three, and almost time for the postman. I believe I hear his whistle now."

At that moment Peter bounded in, his face rosy from his nap. "Postman's coming," he sang out. "Come on, Dori, I'll beat you to the gate."

The girl rose, saying gloomily, "This is probably the fatal day. I'm just sure there'll be a letter from Great-Aunt Jane. I don't see why she chose me when she's never even seen me."

When Dories reached the front door, she saw that Peter was already out in the road, frantically beckoning to her. "Hurry along, Dori. The postman's just leaving Mrs. Doran's," he called; then as the mail wagon, drawn by a lean white horse, approached, the small boy ran out in the road and waved his arms.

Mr. Higgins, who had stopped at their door ever since Peter had been a baby, beamed at him over his glasses. "Law sakes!" he exclaimed, "Do I see a bandit? Guess you've been reading stories about 'Dick Dead-shot' holding up mail coaches in the Rockies. Sorry, but there ain't nothin' for you." Then, smilingly, he addressed the girl. "Likely in a day or two I'll be fetchin' you a letter, Dori, from your old friend Nann Sibbett. It'll be powerfully lonesome around here for you, I reckon, now she's gone."

The girl nodded. "Just awfully lonesome, Mr. Higgins, and please do bring me a letter soon." Just then Johnnie Doran called for Peter to come over and play, and the girl went slowly back to the house.

Her mother looked up inquiringly. "No letter at all," Dories announced in so disappointed a tone that she laughingly confessed, "Mother, I do believe that I'm made up of the contrariest emotions. I do hate the thought of spending that dismal month of October with Great-Aunt Jane at Siquaw Point, but I hate even worse going back to High without Nann."

"Dear girl," the mother's voice held a tenderly given rebuke, "you aren't thinking in the least of the pleasure your companionship might give your Great-Aunt Jane. She was very

fond of your father when he was a boy, and he spent many a summer with her at Siquaw. That may be her reason for inviting you. Your father seemed to be the only person for whom she really cared.” Then, before the rather surprised girl could reply, the mother continued, “I wish, dear, that you would hunt up your Aunt’s last letter and answer it more fully. I was so busy when it came that I merely sent a few lines, thanking her for the invitation.”

Dories sighed as she rose to obey, but turned back to listen when her mother continued: “I know how hard it is going to be, dear girl, but I have a reason, which I cannot explain just now, for very much wishing you to go. Now write the letter and make it as interesting and newsy as you can.”

Dories, from the door, dropped a curtsy. “Very well, Mrs. Moore,” she said, “to please you I’ll write to the crabbedy old lady, but – ” Her mother merrily shook her finger at her. “I want you to withhold judgment, daughter, until you have seen your Great-Aunt Jane.”

CHAPTER III

A LOST MOTHER

A week passed, and though Dories received several picture postcards from her best friend, not a line came from her Great-Aunt Jane.

“She has probably changed her mind about going to Siquaw, dear, and so you would better prepare to start back to school on Monday. I had talked the matter over with the principal, Mr. Setherly, and he told me that you could easily make up October’s work, but, if you are not going away, it will be better for you to begin the term with the others.”

They were at breakfast, and for a long, silent moment the girl sat gazing out of the window at a garden that was beginning to look dry and sear. When she turned back toward her mother, there were tears in her eyes.

The woman placed a hand on the one near her as she tenderly inquired, “Are you disappointed because you’re not going, daughter?”

“No, no, not that, but you can’t know how I dread returning to High without Nann. We had planned graduating together and after that going to college together if only we could find a way.”

Her mother glanced up quickly as though there was something that she wanted to say, then pressed her lips firmly as though to

keep some secret from being uttered. Dories listlessly continued eating. There was a closer pressure of her mother's hand. "It is hard, dear, I know," the understanding voice was saying. "Life brings many disappointments, but there is always a compensation. You'll see!" Then, glancing toward the stair door, which was slowly opening, the mother called, "Hurry up, you lazy Peterkins. Come and have your breakfast. I want you and Dories to go to the village and match some silk for me as soon as you can."

Then, when she served the little fellow, the loving woman returned to her daily task and left a half self-pitying, half rebellious and wholly dispirited girl to wash and put away the dishes. Then listlessly she donned her scarlet tam and sweater coat and went into the sewing room to get the samples that she was to match. Her mother smiled up into her dismal face. "Dori, daughter, don't gloom around so much," she pleaded. "I shall actually believe that you are disappointed because you are *not* going to Siquaw. Now, here's the silk to be matched and there's Peterkins waiting for you. Come back as soon as you can, won't you?"

It was midmorning when Dories and the small boy returned from the shopping expedition. They went at once to the sewing room, but their mother was not there. They looked in the living room and in the kitchen. "Mother, where are you?" they both called, but there was no reply.

"Maybe she's upstairs," Peter suggested.

“Of course. How stupid for me to forget that we have an upstairs to our house.” Dories felt strangely excited as she ran up the circling front stairway calling again and again, but still there was no reply. Down the long upper corridor they went, opening one door and another, beginning to feel almost frightened at the stillness.

Then Dories exclaimed, “Oh, maybe she’s gone over to Mrs. Doran’s for a moment. I guess she couldn’t do any sewing until we came back with the silk.” They were about to descend the back stairs when they heard a noise in the garret overhead.

The frail boy caught his sister’s hand and held it tight. “Do you suppose it’s ghosts,” he whispered.

“No, of course not,” the girl replied. The attic was a low, dark, cobwebby place hardly high enough to stand in, and they never went there. “There are no ghosts. Mother said so.”

“Then maybe it’s a rat scratching around,” the boy suggested, “or that wild barn cat may have got in somehow. Do you dare open the door, Dori, and call up?”

“Of course I do, but first I’ll creep up a little way and look.” Very quietly Dories opened the door and stealthily ascended the dark, short stairway. All was still in the dusky, musty attic. Then a light flashed for a moment in a far corner. Truly frightened, Dories turned and hurried down the stairs. Quick steps were heard above: then a familiar voice called, “Dories, is that you, dear? Why are you stealing about in that way? Come up a moment, daughter! I want you to help me drag this old trunk out

of the corner.”

Then, when the girl, with Peter following, appeared on the top step, the mother explained: “I thought I’d be down before you could get back. I have news for you, Dori. Just after you left, a night letter was delivered. In it your Great-Aunt Jane said that she had entirely given up her plan to spend a month at Siquaw Point until she received your letter. She had decided that if you were so rude as to ignore her invitation, you were not the kind of a girl she wished to know, even if you are her niece, but your letter caused her to change her mind. She wishes you to meet her this afternoon in Boston and go directly from there to Siquaw Point.”

“O, Mother, how terrible!” Doris was truly dismayed. “I won’t have time to let Nann know, and she was to meet me at the station. That was the one redeeming feature about the whole thing.”

“Well, you can see her when you return, and maybe you can plan to stay a day or two with her. Now help me with this little trunk, dear. We have only two hours to prepare your clothes and pack.”

They carried the small steamer trunk down to Doris’ room and by noon it was packed and locked, and, soon after, the expressman came to take both the trunk and the girl to the station.

Doris’ face was flushed and tears were in her eyes when she said good-bye. “I feel so strange and excited, Mother,” she confided, “going out into the world for the very first time, and O,

Mumsie, no one knows how I dread being all alone in a boarded-up cottage at a deserted summer resort with such a dreadful old woman.” Dories clung to her mother in little girl fashion as though she hoped at the very last moment she might be told that she need not go, but what she heard was: “Mr. Hanson is in a hurry, dear. He has the trunk on his cart and he’s waiting to help you up on the seat.”

Dories caught her breath in an effort not to cry, kissed her mother and Peter hurriedly, picked up her hand-satchel and darted down the path.

From the high seat she waved and smiled. Then she called in an effort at cheeriness. “Don’t forget, Mrs. Moore, that you promised to take October for a real vacation and not sew a bit after you finish the silk dress.”

“I promise!” the mother called. “Peter and I will just play. Write to us often.”

Mr. Hanson, finding that it was late, drove rapidly to the station, and it was well that he did, for the train was just drawing in when they arrived. Dories quickly purchased a ticket and checked her trunk with the expressman’s help, then, climbing aboard, chose a seat near a window. After all, she found herself quite pleasurablely excited. It was such a new experience to be traveling alone. Few of the passengers noticed her and no one spoke. She was glad, as her mother had warned her not to enter into conversation with strangers.

As she watched the flying landscape the girl thought of

something her mother had said on the day that she had asked her to answer her Great-Aunt Jane's letter. "I have a reason, Dori, for really wishing you to go to Siquaw with your aunt," she had said. What could that reason be? Not until Boston was neared did her speculation cease; then she became conscious of but two emotions, curiosity about her Great-Aunt Jane and a crushing disappointment because she had not been able to let Nann Sibbett know when to meet her.

When the train finally stopped, Doris, feeling very young and very much alone, followed the crowd of passengers into the huge station. She was to meet her aunt in the woman's waiting room, and she stopped a hurrying porter to inquire where she would find it. Almost timidly she entered the large, comfortably furnished room, then, seeing an elderly woman dressed in black, who was sitting stiffly erect, the girl went toward her as she said diffidently: "Pardon me, but are *you* my Great-Aunt Jane?" The woman threw back a heavy black crepe veil and her sharp gray eyes gazed up at the girl penetratingly.

"Humph!" was the ungracious reply. "Well, at least you've got your father's eyes. That's something to be thankful for, but I've no doubt that you look like your mother otherwise."

There was something about the tone in which this was said that put the girl on the defensive.

"I certainly hope I do look like my darling mother," she exclaimed, her diffidence vanishing. The elderly woman seemed not to hear.

“Sit down, why don’t you?” she said in a querulous tone. “The train doesn’t go for an hour yet.”

The girl sank into a comfortable chair which faced the one occupied by her aunt; the back of which was toward the door.

For a moment neither spoke, then remembering the coaching she had received, Dories said hesitatingly, “I want to thank you, Aunt Jane, for having invited me to go with you. I am pleased to – ”

A sniff preceded the remark that interrupted: “I know how pleased you are to go with a fussy old woman to a deserted summer resort. About as pleased as a cat is out in the rain.” Then, as though her interest in Dories had ceased, the old woman drew the heavy crêpe veil down over her face, but the girl was sure that she could see the sharp eyes peering through it as though she were intently watching some object over Dori’s shoulder.

The girl had expected her aunt to be queer, but this was far worse than her most dismal anticipations. At last the girl became so nervous that she glanced back of her to see what her aunt could be watching. She saw only the open door that led into the main waiting room of the station. Women were passing in and out, but that was nothing to stare at. Seeming, at last, to recall her companion’s presence, the old woman addressed her: “Dories, you wrote me that you had a girl friend here in Boston who would come down to the train to see you off. Why doesn’t she come?”

“I didn’t have time to let her know, Aunt Jane,” was the dismal reply. “I’m just ever so disappointed.”

The old woman nodded her head toward the door. “Is that her?” she asked. “Is that your friend?”

Dories sprang to her feet and turned. A tall girl, carrying a suitcase, was approaching them. With a cry of mingled amazement and joy, Dories ran toward her and held out both hands. “Why, Nann, darling, it *can't* be you.” The newcomer dropped her bag and they flew into each other’s arms. Then, standing back, Dori asked, much mystified, “Why, are you going somewhere Nann?”

It was the old woman who replied grimly: “She is! I invited her to go with us. There now! Don’t try to thank me.” She held up a protesting hand when Dori, flushed and happy, turned toward her. “I did it for myself, I can assure you. I knew having you moping around for a month wouldn’t add any to *my* pleasure.”

An embarrassing moment was saved by a stentorian voice in the doorway announcing: “All aboard for Siquaw Center and way stations.” A colored porter appeared to carry the bags, and the old woman, leaning heavily on her cane, limped after him, followed by the girls, in whose hearts there were mingled emotions, but joy predominated, for, however terrible Dori’s Great-Aunt Jane might be, at least they were to spend a whole long month together.

CHAPTER IV

SEAWARD BOUND

There were very few people on the seaward-bound train; indeed Miss Jane Moore, Nann and Dories were the only occupants of the chair car. After settling herself comfortably in the chair nearest the front, the old woman, with a sweep of her arm toward the back, said almost petulantly: "Sit as far away from me as you can. I may want to sleep, and I know girls. They chatter, chatter, chatter, titter, titter, titter all about nothing."

Her companions were glad to obey, and when they were seated at the rear end of the car, they kept their heads close together while they visited that they might not disturb the elderly woman, who, to all appearances, fell at once into a light doze.

As soon as the train was under way, Dories asked: "Now do tell me how this perfectly, unbelievably wonderful thing has happened?"

Nann laughed happily. "Maybe your Great-Aunt Jane is a fairy godmother in disguise," she whispered. They both glanced at the far corner, but the black veiled figure was much more suggestive of a witch than a good fairy.

"The disguise surely is a complete one," Dories said with a shudder. "My, it gives me the chilly shivers when I think how I might be going to spend a whole month alone with her. But now

tell me, just what did happen?"

"Can't you guess? You wrote your aunt a letter, didn't you, telling all about me and even giving the name of the hotel where Dad and I were staying?"

Dories nodded, "Yes, that's true. Mother wanted me to write to Aunt Jane and I couldn't think of a thing to tell her about, and so I wrote about you."

"Well," Nann continued to enlighten her friend, "she must have written me that very day inviting me to be her guest at Siquaw Point for the month of October, but she asked me not to let you know. I sent the last picture postcard, the one of our hotel, just after I had received her letter, and you can imagine how wild I was to tell you. I hadn't started going to the Boston High. Dear old Dad said a month later wouldn't matter, and so here I am." The girls clasped hands and beamed joyfully at each other.

Dories' next glance toward the sleeping old woman was one of gratitude. "I'm going to try hard to love her, that is, if she'll let me." Then, after a thoughtful moment, Dories continued: "Great-Aunt Jane must have been very different when Dad was a boy, for he cared a lot for her, Mother said." Then with one of her quick changes she exclaimed in a low voice, "Nann Sibbett, I have lain awake nights dreading the dismal month I was to spend at that forsaken summer resort. I just knew there'd be ghosts in those boarded-up cottages, but now that you're going to be with me, I almost hope that something exciting will happen."

"So do I!" Nann agreed.

It was four o'clock when the train, which consisted of an engine, two coaches and a chair-car, stopped in what seemed at first to be but wide stretches of meadows and marsh lands, but, peering ahead, the girls saw a few wooden buildings and a platform. "Siquaw Center!" the brakeman opened a door to announce. Miss Jane Moore sat up so suddenly, and when she threw back her veil she seemed so very wide awake, the girls found themselves wondering if she had really been asleep at all. The brakeman assisted the old woman to alight and placed her bags on the platform, then, hardly pausing, the train again was under way. Meadows and marshes stretched in all directions, but about a mile to the east the girls could see a wide expanse of gray-blue ocean.

"I guess the name means the center of the marshes," Dori whispered, making a wry face while her aunt was talking to the station-master, a tall, lank, red-whiskered man in blue overalls who did not remove his cap nor stop chewing what seemed to be a rather large quid.

"Yeah!" the girls heard his reply to the woman's question. "Gib'll fetch the stage right over. Quare time o' year for yo' to be comin' out, Mis' Moore, ain't it? Yeah! I got your letter this here mornin'. The supplies ar' all ready to tote over to yer cottage."

The girls were wondering who Gib might be when they heard a rumbling beyond the wooden building and saw a very old stage coach drawn by a rather boney old white horse and driven by a tall, lank, red-headed boy. A small girl, with curls of the

same color, sat on the high seat at his side. "Hurry up, thar, you Gib Strait!" the man, who was recognizable as the boy's father, called to him. "Come tote Mis' Moore's luggage." Then the man sauntered off, having not even glanced in the direction of the two girls, but the rather ungainly boy who was hurrying toward them was looking at them with but slightly concealed curiosity.

Miss Moore greeted him with, "How do you do, Gibraltar Strait." Upon hearing this astonishing name, the two girls found it hard not to laugh, but the lad, evidently understanding, smiled broadly and nodded awkwardly as Miss Moore solemnly proceeded to introduce him.

To cover his embarrassment, the lad hastened to say. "Well, Miss Moore, sort o' surprisin' to see yo' hereabouts this time o' year. Be yo' goin' to the Pint?"

The old woman looked at him scathingly. "Well, Gibraltar, where in heaven's name would I be going? I'm not crazy enough yet to stay long in the Center. Here, you take my bags; the girls can carry their own."

"Yessum, Miss Moore," the boy flushed up to the roots of his red hair. He knew that he wasn't making a very good impression on the young ladies. He glanced at them furtively as they all walked toward the stage; then, when he saw them smiling toward him, not critically but in a most friendly fashion, there was merry response in his warm red-brown eyes. What he said was: "If them bags are too hefty, set 'em down an' I'll come back for 'em."

"O, we can carry them easily," Nann assured him.

The small girl on the high seat was staring down at them with eyes and mouth open. She had on a nondescript dress which very evidently had been made over from a garment meant for someone older. When the girls glanced up, she smiled down at them, showing an open space where two front teeth were missing.

“What’s your name, little one?” Nann called up to her. The lad was inside the coach helping Miss Moore to settle among her bags.

The child’s grin grew wilder, but she did not reply. Nann turned toward her brother, who was just emerging: “What is your little sister’s name?” she asked.

The boy flushed. Nann and Dori decided that he was easily embarrassed or that he was unused to girls of his own age. But they better understood the flush when they heard the answer: “Her name’s Behring.” Then he hurried on to explain: “I know our names are queer. It was Pa’s notion to give us geography names, being as our last is Strait. That’s why mine’s Gibraltar. Yo’ kin laugh if yo’ want to,” he added good-naturedly. “I would if ’twasn’t my name.” Then in a low voice, with a swift glance toward the station, he confided, “I mean to change my name when I come of age. I sure sartin do.”

The girls felt at once that they would like this boy whose sensitive face expressed his every emotion and who had so evident a sense of humor. They were about to climb inside of the coach with Miss Moore when a shrill, querulous voice from a general store across from the station attracted their attention. A

tall, angular woman in a skimpy calico dress stood there. "Howdy, Miss Moore," she called, then as though not expecting a reply to her salutation, she continued: "Behring Strait, you come here right this minute and mind the baby. What yo' gallavantin' off fer, and me with the supper gettin' to do?" Nann and Dori glanced at each other merrily, each wondering which strait the baby was named after.

The small girl obeyed quickly. Mrs. Strait impressed the listeners as a woman who demanded instant obedience. As soon as the three passengers were settled inside, the coach started with a lurch. The sandy road wound through the wide, swampy meadows. It was rough and rutty. Miss Moore sat with closed eyes and, as she was wedged in between two heavy bags, she was not jounced about as much as were the girls. They took it good-naturedly, but Doris found it hard to imagine how she could have endured the journey if she had been alone with her queer Aunt Jane. Nann decided that the old woman feined sleep on all occasions to avoid the necessity of talking to them.

At last, even above the rattle of the old coach, could be heard the crashing surf on rocks, and the girls peered eagerly ahead. What they saw was a wide strip of sand and a row of weather-beaten cottages, boarded up, as Dori had prophesied, and beyond them white-crested, huge gray breakers rushing and roaring up on the sand.

The boney white horse came to a sudden stop at the edge of the beach, nor would it attempt to go any farther. The boy leaped

over a wheel and threw open the back door. "Guess you'll have to walk a piece along the beach, Miss Moore. The coach gets stuck so often in the sand ol' Methuselah ain't takin' no chances at tryin' to haul it out," he informed the occupants.

The girls were almost surprised to find that the horse hadn't been named after a strait. Miss Moore threw back her veil and opened her eyes at once. Upon hearing what the boy had to say, she leaned forward to gaze at the largest cottage in the middle of the row. She spoke sharply: "Gibraltar, why didn't your father carry out my orders? I wrote him distinctly to open up the cottage and air it out. Why didn't he do that when he brought over the supplies, that's what I'd like to know? I declare to it, even if he is your father, I must say Simon Strait is a most shiftless man."

The boy said at once, as though in an effort to apologize: "Pa's been real sick all summer, Miss Moore, and like 'twas he fergot it, but I kin open up easy, if I kin find suthin' to pry off the boards with. I think likely I'll find an axe, anyhow, out in the back shed whar I used to chop wood fer you. I'm most sure I will."

Miss Moore sank back. "Well, hurry up about it, then. I'll stay in the coach till you get the windows uncovered." When the boy was gone, the woman turned toward her niece. "Open up that small black bag, Dories; the one near you, and get out the back-door key. There's a hammer just inside on the kitchen table, if it's where I left it." She continued her directions: "Give it to Gibraltar and tell him, when he gets the boards off the windows, to carry in some wood and make a fire. A fog is coming in this minute

and it's as wet as rain."

The key having been found, the girls ran gleefully around the cabin in search of the boy. They found him emerging from a shed carrying a hatchet. He grinned at them as though they were old friends. "Some cheerful place, this!" he commented as he began ripping off the boards from one of the kitchen windows. "You girls must o' needed sea air a lot to come to this place out o' season like this with a – a – wall, with a old lady like Miss Moore is." Doris felt sure that the boy was thinking something quite different, but was not saying it because it was a relative of hers about whom he was talking. What she replied was: "I can't understand it myself. I mean why Great-Aunt Jane wanted to come to this dismal place after everyone else has gone."

They were up on the back porch and, as she looked out across the swampy meadows over which a heavy fog was settling, then she continued, more to Nann than to the boy: "I promised Mother I wouldn't be afraid of ghosts, but honestly I never saw a spookier place."

The boy had been making so much noise ripping off boards that he had only heard the last two words. "Spooks war yo' speakin' of?" he inquired. "Well, I guess yo'll think thar's spooks enough along about the middle of the night when the fog horn's a moanin' an' the surf's a crashin' out on the pint o' rocks, an' what's more, thar *is* folks at Siquaw Center as says thar's a sure enough spook livin' over in the ruins that used to be ol' Colonel Wadbury's place."

The girls shuddered and Dories cast a “Didn’t I tell you so” glance at her friend, but Nann, less fearful by nature, was interested and curious, and after looking about in vain for the “ruin”, she inquired its whereabouts.

Gibraltar enlightened them. “O, ’tisin’t in sight,” he said, “that is, not from here. It’s over beyant the rocky pint. From the highest rock thar you kin see it plain.”

Then as he went on around the cottage taking off boards, the girls followed to hear more of the interesting subject. “Fine house it used to be when my Pa was a kid, but now thar’s nothing but stone walls a standin’. A human bein’ couldn’t live in that ol’ shell, nohow. But – ” the boy could not resist the temptation to elaborate the theme when he saw the wide eyes of his listeners, “long about midnight folks at the Center do say as how they’ve seen a light movin’ about in the old ruin. Nobody’s dared to go near ’nuf to find out what ’tis. The swamps all about are like quicksand. If you step in ’em, wall, golly gee, it’s good-bye fer yo’. Leastwise that’s what ol’-timers say, an’ so the spook, if thar is one over thar, is safe ’nuf from introosion.”

While the boy had been talking, he had removed all of the wooden blinds, his listeners having followed him about the cabin. Dories had been so interested that she had quite forgotten about the huge key that she had been carrying. “O my!” she exclaimed, suddenly noticing it. “But then you didn’t need the hammer after all. Now I’ll skip around and open the back door, and, Gibraltar, will you bring in some wood, Aunt Jane said, to build us a fire?”

While the boy was gone, Nann confided merrily, "There now, Doris Moore, you've been wishing for an adventure, and here is one all ready made and waiting. Pray, what could be more thrilling than an old ruin surrounded by an uncrossable swamp and a mysterious light which appears at midnight?"

The boy returned with an armful of logs left over from the supply of a previous summer. "Gib," Nann addressed him in her friendliest fashion, "may we call you that? Gibraltar is *so* long. I'd like to visit your ruin and inspect the ghost in his lair. Really and truly, isn't there any way to reach the place?"

The boy looked as though he had a secret which he did not care to reveal. "Well, maybe there is, and maybe there isn't," he said uncommittedly. Then, with a brightening expression in his red-brown eyes, "Anyway, I'll show you the old ruin if yo'll meet me at sun-up tomorrow mornin' out at the pint o' rocks."

"I'm game," Nann said gleefully. "It sounds interesting to me all right. How about you, Dori?"

"O, I'm quite willing to see the place from a distance," the other replied, "but nothing could induce me to go very near it." Neither of the girls thought of asking the advice of their elderly hostess, who, at that very moment, appeared around a corner of the cabin to inquire why it was taking such an endless time to open up the cottage. Luckily Gib had started a fire in the kitchen stove, which partly mollified the woman's wrath. After bringing in the bags and supplies, the boy took his departure, and they could hear him whistling as he drove away through the fog.

CHAPTER V

A NEW EXPERIENCE

With the closing in of the fog, twilight settled about the cabin. The old woman, still in her black bonnet with the veil thrown back, drew a wooden arm chair close to the stove and held her hands out toward the warmth. "Open up the box of supplies, Dories," she commanded, "and get out some candles. Then you can fill a hot-water bottle for me and I'll go right to bed. No use making a fire in the front room until tomorrow. You girls are to sleep upstairs. You'll find bedding in a bureau up there. It may be damp, but you're young. It won't hurt you any."

Dories, having opened up the box of supplies, removed each article, placing it on the table. At the very bottom she found a note scribbled on a piece of wrapping paper: "Out of candles. Send some tomorrer."

Miss Moore sat up ramrod-straight, her sharp gray eyes narrowing angrily. "If that isn't just like that shiftless, good-for-nothing Simon Strait. How did he suppose we could get on without light? I wish now I had ordered kerosene, but I thought, just at first, that candles would do." In the dusk Nann had been looking about the kitchen. On a shelf she saw a lantern and two glass lamps. "O, Miss Moore!" she exclaimed, "Don't you think maybe there might be oil in one of those lamps?"

“No, I don’t,” the old woman replied. “I always had my maid empty them the last thing for fear of fire.” Nann, standing on a chair, had taken down the lantern. Her face brightened. “I hear a swish,” she said hopefully, “and so it must be oil.” With a piece of wrapping paper she wiped off the dust while Dories brought forth a box of matches.

A dim, sputtering light rewarded them. “It won’t last long,” Nann said as she placed the lantern on the table, “So, Miss Moore, if you’ll tell us what to do to make you comfortable, we’ll hurry around and do it.”

“Comfortable? Humph! We won’t any of us be very comfortable with such a wet fog penetrating even into our bones.” The old woman complained so bitterly that Dories found herself wondering why her Great-Aunt Jane had come at all if she had known that she would be uncomfortable. But she had no time to give the matter further thought, for Miss Moore was issuing orders. “Dories, you work that pump-handle over there in the sink. If it needs priming, we won’t get any water tonight. Well, thank goodness, it doesn’t. That’s one thing that went right. Nann, you rinse out the tea kettle, fill it and set it to boil. Now you girls take the lantern and go to my bedroom. It’s just off the big front room, so you can’t miss it; open up the bottom bureau drawer and fetch out my bedding. We’ll hang it over chairs by the stove till the damp gets out of it.”

Nann took the sputtering lantern and, being the fearless one of the two, she led the way into the big front room of the cabin.

The furniture could not be seen for the sheetlike coverings. In the dim light the girls could see a few pictures turned face to the wall. "Oh-oo!" Doris shuddered. "It's clammy damp in here. Think of it, Nann, can you conceive *what* it would have been like for *me* if I had come all alone with Aunt Jane? Well, I know just as well as I know anything that I would never have lived through this first night."

Nann laughed merrily. "O, Dori," she exclaimed as she held the lantern up, "Do look at this wonderful, huge stone fireplace. I'm sure we're going to enjoy it here when we get things straightened around and the sun is shining. You see if we don't." Nann was opening a door which she believed must lead into Miss Moore's bedroom, and she was right. The dim, flickering light revealed an old-fashioned hand-turned bed with four high posts. Near was an antique bureau, and Dori quickly opened the bottom drawer and took out the needed bedding. With her arms piled high, she followed the lantern-bearer back to the kitchen. Miss Moore had evidently not moved from her chair by the stove. "Put on another piece of wood, Dori," she commanded. "Now fetch all the chairs up and spread the bedding on it."

When this had been done, the teakettle was singing, and Nann said brightly, "What a little optimist a teakettle is! It sings even when things are darkest."

"You mean when things are hottest," Dori put in, actually laughing.

The old woman was still giving orders. "The dishes are in that

cupboard over the table,” she nodded in that direction. “Fetch out a cup and saucer, Dories, wash them with some hot water and make me a cup of tea. Then, while I drink it, you can both spread up my bed.”

Fifteen minutes later all these things had been accomplished. The old woman acknowledged that she was as comfortable as possible in her warm bed. When they had said good-night, she called, “Dories, I forgot to tell you the stairway to your room leads up from the back porch.” Then she added, as an afterthought, “You girls will want to eat something, but for mercy sake, do close the living-room door so I won’t hear your clatter.”

Nann, whose enjoyment of the situation was real and not feigned, placed the sputtering lantern on the kitchen table while Dories softly closed the door as she had been directed. Then they stood and gazed at the supplies still in boxes and bundles on the oilcloth-covered table. “I never was hungrier!” Dories announced. “But there isn’t time to really cook anything before the light will go out. Oh-oo! Think how terrible it would be to have to climb up that cold, wet outside stairway to a room in the loft and get into cold, wet bedding, and all in the dark.”

Nann laughed. “Well, I’ll confess it *is* rather spooky,” she agreed, “and if I believed in ghosts I might be scared.” Then, as the lantern gave a warning flicker, the older girl suggested: “What say to turning out the light and make more fire in the stove? It really is quite bright over in that corner.”

“I guess it’s the only thing to do,” Dori acknowledged

dolefully. "O goodie," she added more cheerfully as she held up a box of crackers. "These, with butter and some sardines, *ought* to keep us from starving."

"Great!" Nann seemed determined to be appreciative. "And for a drink let's have cambric tea with canned milk and sugar. Now the next thing, where is a can opener?"

She opened a drawer in the kitchen table and squealed exultingly, "Dories Moore, see what I've found." She was holding something up. "It's a little candle end, but it will be just the thing if we need a light in the night when our oil is gone."

"Goodness!" Dories shuddered. "I hope we'll sleep so tight we won't know it is night until after it's over."

Nann had also found a can opener and they were soon hungrily eating the supper Dories had suggested. "I call this a great lark!" the older girl said brightly. They were sitting on straight wooden chairs, drawn close to the bright fire, and their viands were on another chair between them.

"The kitchen is so nice and warm now that I hate plunging out into the fog to go upstairs," Dori shudderingly remarked. "I presume that is where Aunt Jane's maid used to sleep. Mumsie said she had one named Maggie who had been with her forever, almost. But she died last June. That must be why Aunt Jane didn't come here this summer."

When the girls had eaten all of the sardines and crackers and had been refreshed with cambric tea, they rose and looked at each other almost tragically. Then Nann smiled. "Don't let's give

ourselves time to think,” she suggested. “Let’s take a box of matches. You get one while I relight the lantern. I have the candle end in my pocket. Now, bolster up your courage and open the door while I shelter our flickering flame from the cold night air that might blow it out.”

Dories had her hand on the knob of the door which led out upon the back porch, but before opening it, she whispered, “Nann, you don’t suppose that ghost over in the ruin ever prowls around anywhere else, do you?”

“Of course not, silly!” Nann’s tone was reassuring. “There isn’t a ghost in the old ruin, or anywhere else for that matter. Now open the door and let’s ascend to our chamber.”

The fog on the back porch was so dense that it was difficult for the girls to find the entrance to their boarded-in stairway. As they started the ascent, Nann in the lead, they were both wondering what they would find when they reached their loft bedroom.

CHAPTER VI

A LIGHT IN THE DARK

The girls cautiously crept up the back stairway which was sheltered from fog and wind only by rough boards between which were often wide cracks. Time and again a puff of air threatened to put out the flickering flame in the lantern. With one hand Nann guarded it, lest it suddenly sputter out and leave them in darkness. There was a closed door at the top of the stairs, and of course, it was locked, but the key was in it.

“Doesn’t that seem sort of queer?” Dories asked as her friend unlocked the door, removed the key and placed it on the inside.

“Well, it does, sort of,” Nann had to acknowledge, “but I’m mighty glad it was there, or how else could we have entered?”

Dories said nothing, but, deep in her heart, she was wishing that she and Nann were safely back in Elmwood, where there were electric lights and other comforts of civilization.

Holding the lantern high, the girls stood in the middle of the loft room and looked around. It was unfinished after the fashion of attics, and though it was quite high at the peak, the sloping roof made a tent-like effect. There were two windows. One opened out toward the rocky point, above which a continuous inward rush of white breakers could be seen, and the other, at the opposite side, opened toward swampy meadows, a mile across

which on clear nights could be seen the lights of Siquaw Center.

A big, old-fashioned high posted bed, an equally old-fashioned mahogany bureau and two chairs were all of the furnishings.

They found bedding in the bureau drawers, as Miss Moore had told them. Placing the lantern on the bureau, Nann said: "If we wish to have light on the subject, we'd better make the bed in a hurry. You take that side and I'll take this, and we'll have these quilts spread in a twinkling."

Dories did as she was told and the bed was soon ready for occupancy. Then the girls scrambled out of their dresses, and, just as they leaped in between the quilts, the flame in the lantern sputtered and went out.

Dories clutched her friend fearfully. "Oh, Nann," she said, "we never looked under the bed nor behind that curtained-off corner. I don't dare go to sleep unless I know what's there."

Her companion laughed. "What do you 'spose is there?" she inquired.

"How can I tell?" Dories retorted. "That's why I wish we had looked and then I would know."

Her friend's voice, merry even in the darkness, was reassuring. "I can tell you just as well as if I had looked," she announced with confidence. "Back of these curtains, you would find nothing but a row of nails or hooks on which to hang our garments when we unpack our suitcases, and under the bed there is only dust in little rolled-up heaps – like as not. Now, dear, let's see who can go to sleep first, for you know we have an engagement with our friend,

Gibraltar Strait, at sunrise tomorrow morning.”

“You say that as though you were pleased with the prospect,” Dories complained.

“Pleased fails to express the joy with which I anticipate the –” Nann said no more, for Dories had clutched her, whispering excitedly, “Hark! What was that noise? It sounds far off, maybe where the haunted ruin is.”

Nann listened and then calmly replied: “More than likely it’s the fog horn about which Gib told us, and that other noise is the muffled roar of the surf crashing over the rocks out on the point. If there are any more noises that you wish me to explain, please produce them now. If not, I’m going to sleep.”

After that Dories lay very still for a time, confident that she wouldn’t sleep a wink. Nann, however, was soon deep in slumber and Dories soon followed her example. It was midnight when she awakened with a start, sat up and looked about her. She felt sure that a light had awakened her. At first she couldn’t recall where she was. She turned toward the window. The fog had lifted and the night was clear. For a moment she sat watching the white, rushing line of the surf, then, farther along, she saw a dark looming object.

Suddenly she clutched her companion. “Nann,” she whispered dramatically, “there it is! There’s a light moving over by the point. Do you suppose that’s the ghost from the old ruin?”

“The what?” Nann sat up, dazed from being so suddenly awakened. Then, when Dories repeated her remark, her

companion gazed out of the window toward the point.

“H’m-m!” she said, “It’s a light all right. A lantern, I should say, and its moving slowly along as though it were being carried by someone who is searching for something among the rocks.”

Dori’s hold on her friend’s arm became tighter. “It’s coming this way! I’m just ever so sure that it is. Oh, Nann, why did we come to this dreadful place? What if that light came right up to this cottage and saw that it wasn’t boarded up and knew someone was here and – ”

Nann chuckled. “Aren’t you getting rather mixed in your figures of speech?” she teased. “A lantern can’t see or know, but of course I understand that you mean the-well-er-person carrying the lantern. I suppose you will agree that it is a person, for ghosts don’t have to carry lanterns, you know.”

“How do you know so much about ghosts, since you say there are no such things?” Dori flared.

“Well, nothing can’t carry a lantern, can it?” was the unruffled reply. Then the two girls were silent, watching the light which seemed now and then to be held high as though whoever carried it paused at times to look about him and then continued to search on the rocks.

Slowly, slowly the light approached the row of boarded-up cabins. The girls crept from bed and knelt at the window on the seaward side. Nann, because she was interested, and Dori because she did not want to be left alone.

“Do you think it’s coming this far?” came the anxious whisper.

Nann shook her head. "No," she said, "it's going back toward the point and so I'm going back to bed. I'm chilled through as it is."

They were soon under the covers and when they again glanced toward the window the light had disappeared. "Seems to have been swallowed up," Nann remarked.

"Maybe it's fallen over the cliff. I almost hope that it has, and been swept out to sea."

"Meaning the lantern, I suppose, or do you mean the carrier thereof?"

"Nann Sibbett, I don't see how you can help being just as afraid of whatever it is, or, rather of whoever it is, as I am."

"Because I am convinced that since it, or he, doesn't know of my existence, I am not the object of the search, so why should I be afraid? Now, Miss Dories Moore, if you wish to stay awake speculating as to what became of that light, you may, but I'm going to sleep, and, if this loft bedroom of ours is just swarming with ghosts and mysterious lights, don't you waken me to look at them until morning."

So saying, Nann curled up and went to sleep. Dories, fearing that she would again be awakened by a light, drew the quilt up over her head so that she could not see it.

Although she was nearly smothered, like an ostrich, she felt safer, and in time she too slept, but she dreamed of headless horsemen and hollow-eyed skeletons that walked out on the rocky point at midnight carrying lanterns.

It was nearing dawn when a low whistle outside awakened the

girls.

“It’s Gibraltar Strait, I do believe,” Nann declared, at once alert. Then, as she sprang up, she whispered, “Do hurry, Dori. I feel ever so sure that we are this day starting on a thrilling adventure.”

CHAPTER VII

THE PHANTOM YACHT

The girls dressed hurriedly and silently, then crept down the boarded-in stairway and emerged upon the back porch of the cottage. It was not yet dawn, but a rosy glow in the east assured them that the day was near.

The waiting lad knew that the girls had something to tell, nor was he wrong.

“Oh, Gibraltar, what do you think?” Dories began at once in an excited whisper that they might not disturb Great-Aunt Jane, who, without doubt, was still asleep.

“I dunno. What?” the boy was frankly curious.

“We saw it last night. We saw it with our very own eyes! Didn’t we, Nann?” The other maiden agreed.

“You saw what?” asked the mystified boy, looking from one to the other. Then, comprehendingly, he added: “Gee, you don’t mean as you saw the spook from the old ruin, do you?”

Dories nodded, but Nann modified: “Not that, Gibraltar. Since there is no such thing as a ghost, how could we see it? But we did see the light you were telling about. Someone was walking along the rocks out on the point carrying a lighted lantern.”

“Wall,” the boy announced triumphantly, “that proves ’twas a spook, ’cause human beings couldn’t get a foothold out there, the

rocks are so jagged and irregular like. But come along, maybe we can find footprints or suthin'."

The sun was just rising out of the sea when the three young people stole back of the boarded-up cottages that stood in a silent row, and emerged upon the wide stretch of sandy beach that led toward the point.

The tide was low and the waves small and far out. The wet sand glistened with myriad colors as the sun rose higher. The air was tinglingly cold and, once out of hearing of the aunt, the girls, no longer fearful, ran along on the hard sand, laughing and shouting joyfully, while the boy, to express the exuberance of his feelings, occasionally turned a hand-spring just ahead of them.

"Oh, what a wonderful morning!" Nann exclaimed, throwing out her arms toward the sea and taking a deep breath. "It's good just to be alive."

Dories agreed. "It's hard to believe in ghosts on a day like this," she declared.

"Then why try?" Nan merrily questioned.

They had reached the high headland of jagged rocks that stretched out into the sea, and Gibraltar, bounding ahead, climbed from one rock to another, sure-footed as a goat but the girls remained on the sand.

When he turned, they called up to him: "Do you see anything suspicious looking?"

"Nixy!" was the boy's reply. Then anxiously: "D'ye think yo' girls can climb on the tip-top rock?" Then, noting Dories' anxious

expression as she viewed the jagged cliff-like mass ahead of her, he concluded with. "O, course yo' can't. Hold on, I'll give yo' a hand."

Very carefully the boy selected crevices that made stairs on which to climb, and the girls, delighted with the adventure, soon arrived on the highest rock, which they were glad to find was so huge and flat that they could all stand there without fear of falling.

"This is a dizzy height," Dories said, looking down at the waves that were lazily breaking on the lowest rocks. "But there's one thing that puzzles me and makes me think more than ever that what we saw last night was a ghost."

"I know," Nann put in. "I believe I am thinking the same thing. *How* could a man walk back and forth on these jagged rocks carrying a lantern?"

"Huh," their companion remarked, "Spooks kin walk anywhar's they choose."

"Why, Gibraltar Strait, I do believe that you think there is a ghost in –" She paused and turned to look in the direction that the boy was pointing. On the other side of the point, below them, was a swamp, dense with high rattling tullies and cat-tails. It looked dark and treacherous, for, as yet, the sunlight had not reached it. About two hundred feet back from the sea stood the forlorn ruin of what had once been, apparently, a fine stone mansion.

Two stained white pillars, standing in front, were like ghostly sentinels telling where the spacious porch had been. Behind them

were jagged heaps of crumbling rock, all that remained of the front and side walls. The wall in the rear was still standing, and from it the roof, having lost its support in front, pitched forward with great yawning gaps in it, where chimneys had been.

Dories unconsciously clung to her friend as they stood gazing down at the old ruin. "Poor, poor thing," Nann said, "how sad and lonely it must be, for, I suppose, once upon a time it was very fine home filled with love and happiness. Wasn't it, Gibraltar? If you know the story of the old house, please tell it to us?"

The boy cast a quick glance at the timid Dories. "I dunno as I'd ought to. She scares so easy," he told them.

"I'll promise not to scare this time," Dories hastened to say. "Honest, Gib, I am as eager to hear the story as Nann is, so please tell it."

Thus urged, the boy began. He did not speak, however, in his usual merry, bantering voice, but in a hollow whisper which he believed better fitted to the tale he had to tell.

"Wall," he said, as he seated himself on a rock, motioning the girls to do likewise, "I might as well start way back at the beginnin'. Pa says that this here house was built nigh thirty year ago by a fine upstandin' man as called himself Colonel Wadbury and gave out that he'd come from Virginia for his gal's health. Pa said the gal was a sad-lookin' creature as ever he'd set eyes on, an' bye an' bye 'twas rumored around Siquaw that she was in love an' wantin' to marry some furreigner, an' that the old Colonel had fetched her to this out-o'-the-way place so that he could keep

watch on her. He sure sartin built her a fine mansion to live in.

“Pa said ’twas filled with paintin’s of ancestors, and books an’ queer furreign rugs a hangin’ on the walls, though thar was plenty beside on the floor. Pa’d been to a museum up to Boston onct, an’ he said as ’twas purty much like that inside the place.

“Wall, when ’twas all finished, the two tuk to livin’ in it with a man servant an’ an old woman to keep an eye on the gal, seemed like.

“Twan’t swamp around here in those days, ’twas sand, and the Colonel had a plant put in that grew all over – sand verbeny he called it, but folks in Siquaw Center shook their heads, knowin’ as how the day would come when the old sea would rise up an’ claim its own, bein’ as that had all been ocean onct on a time.

“Pa says as how he tol’ the Colonel that he was takin’ big chances, buildin’ a house as hefty as that thar one, on nothin’ but sand, but that wan’t all he built either. Furst off ’twas a high sea wall to keep the ocean back off his place, then ’twas a pier wi’ lights along it, and then he fetched a yacht from somewhere.

“Pa says he’d never seen a craft like it, an’ he’d been a seafarin’ man ever since the North Star tuk to shinin’, or a powerful long time, anyhow. That yacht, Pa says, was the whitest, mos’ glistenin’ thing he’d ever sot eyes on. An’ graceful! When the sailors, as wore white clothes, tuk to sailin’ it up and down, Pa says folks from Siquaw Center tuk a holiday just to come down to the shore to watch the craft. It slid along so silent and was so all-over white, Gus Pilsley, him as was school teacher days and

kep' the poolhall nights, said it looked like a 'phantom yacht,' an' that's what folks got to callin' it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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