

Vandercook Margaret

The Camp Fire Girls by the Blue Lagoon



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CHAPTER I

THE CITY OF TOWERS

One afternoon in October two girls were walking down Fifth Avenue. They were strangers in New York. One of them, a tall, fair girl, dressed in a dark blue tailor suit, furs, and a close-fitting velvet hat, was several years older than her companion, who was small with dark eyes, a sallow skin and an oddly unconventional appearance which seemed to accord with her costume, a brown serge cape, a gown of the same material and an old-fashioned poke bonnet of flowered silk.

In another hour the shops would close and the crowds come pouring forth into the streets.

"Are you tired, Elce? I had forgotten you were never in New York save the one day when you landed. The hotel is only a few blocks further on, yet perhaps it might have been wiser not to have attempted to walk from the station."

Bettina Graham, who was carrying a small suitcase, made an effort to slacken her pace, her companion with quicker, shorter steps keeping close beside her.

"No, I am not tired," she answered, "it is only the noise that confuses me. I never could have imagined anything like it. Yet I think I once dreamed of a city like this, of tall towers and streets that are ravines between high cliffs, with the same bright blue sky overhead."

The older girl smiled.

"You are a fanciful person, but dreaming in New York is a dangerous pastime, where one must watch every foot of the way."

The afternoon was warm and brilliant, with only a faint suggestion of frost, the shop windows filled with brilliant displays, the streets crowded with automobiles.

Bettina's expression changed, her eyes shone, her lips parted slightly as the color swept into her cheeks.

"New York is fascinating, isn't it? One forgets how fascinating even when one has been away only a short time. I do hope I may be able to spend the winter here! But for you, Elce, who have lived almost your entire life in the country, it must be a wholly new experience. Well, we are both runaways this afternoon!

"There is Mrs. Burton's hotel just around the corner of the next block. At this hour, between five and six o'clock, she must be at home."

Unconsciously Bettina began to move more rapidly, with the appearance of a runner whose goal is nearly in sight.

"I'll send up our cards and she will see us at once. I am sorry our train was two hours late. I presume I ought to have telegraphed. One does not enjoy the idea of being alone in New York." Bettina laughed. "Don't be troubled, there is not the faintest chance of such a disaster. Now that our Camp Fire guardian has returned to the stage and her play become one of the greatest successes of the winter, I suppose she does have to excuse herself to a good many persons, yet she will scarcely decline to see us."

Not talking to her companion so much as to herself, Bettina at the same time was studying the faces of the passers-by, divided between her interest in New York, the contagion of the brilliant autumn day and her undoubted nervousness over some personal problem.

Reaching the desired hotel, after an instant's hesitation, the two girls entered, Bettina feeling an unaccustomed awkwardness and embarrassment. Notwithstanding the fact that she had traveled

many miles in the past few years in her own country and in Europe, this was the first occasion when she had been without a chaperon.

Declining to surrender her suitcase, Bettina asked the clerk to announce her arrival to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burton. In a measure she felt prepared to have her request refused, as Mrs. Burton would probably wish to be excused to visitors at this hour. She meant to be insistent, even if necessary to telephone her own name.

The clerk shook his head.

"Sorry, miss, but Captain and Mrs. Burton are not in; they left this hotel four or five days ago and took an apartment of their own."

"You don't mean they are no longer living here?"

To her own ears Bettina's voice sounded more startled than it should. "Then will you be kind enough to give me their new address, as I wish to find them at once."

She thought she saw a faint look of sympathy and regret on the clerk's face.

"Sorry again, but Captain Burton left strict orders their new address was to be given to no one. They do not wish to see strangers. Their friends they intend notifying themselves. Perhaps you want Mrs. Burton to help you to go on the stage, so many young women call on her for this purpose and she has been giving up so much time to them, Captain Burton does not wish her to be disturbed in the future."

Bettina flushed and frowned.

"No, I am not looking for work and I am not a stranger to Mrs. Burton. She and Captain Burton would wish you to tell me where they are living. Mrs. Burton is a kind of relative, or at least she is an intimate friend."

The clerk smiled.

"That is what everyone says. I regret not being able to oblige you, but orders are orders."

As if Bettina were no longer demanding his attention he turned to some one who had been waiting and was now inquiring for a room.

Wishing to discuss a question of great importance to her own happiness with her Camp Fire guardian, Bettina had run away from home. The act was not premeditated. When she made her sudden decision her mother and father chanced to be spending a few days away from Washington. Nor would they have objected to her journey, save to prefer that she have an older companion than the little English girl, Elce, originally known as Chitty, whom the Camp Fire girls had known during the summer in "Merrie England."

Bettina had not seen her Camp Fire guardian in six months, not since their parting at Half Moon Lake. Of late, not once, but many times her mother had announced that she would like the benefit of Polly Burton's advice on the question which divided them.

So Bettina suddenly had set out on her pilgrimage to New York with this end in view. To arrive unheralded and not find Mrs. Burton, to be compelled to spend the night with Elce as her only companion would but deepen her mother's impression that she possessed neither the judgment nor experience necessary for the independence she desired.

Nothing would be gained by looking inside her pocket book. She knew exactly the amount of money it contained.

After paying for her own and Elce's tickets and an expensive lunch on the train she had counted it carefully. Seven dollars and forty cents then had seemed a sufficient amount when she expected to be with her Camp Fire guardian in a few hours; it was woefully insufficient to meet the expenses of two persons in New York.

There was one friend to whom she might appeal, but this would make her present difficulty with her mother the greater. Surely there must be some method of discovering her Camp Fire guardian, if only she were not so stupid that she had no idea what to do next. In any case she would not remain

longer in the lobby of the hotel and she declined to question the clerk a third time. In the street she would receive fresh inspiration.

She and Elce left the hotel.

Outdoors no new idea immediately occurred to her. It seemed strange that her mother had not mentioned Mrs. Burton's change of address: as they never failed to write each other once a week, undoubtedly she must know. Then Bettina recalled the fact that she and her mother had had but little to say to each other of late, since no matter upon what subject they started to talk, always the conversation veered to the difference between them.

"Don't be worried, dear, I shall be able to think what to do in a few moments," Bettina remarked, with more courage than conviction. "It was ridiculous for the hotel management to decline to give me Tante's change of address. She and Captain Burton will both be annoyed; the clerk should have known they might wish some exception to be made to their order."

Elce nodded, regretting that she was unable to offer any advice and yet perfectly content to abide by Bettina's judgment. In a strange and unfamiliar world, Bettina was her one anchor. Sent to a boarding school, from loneliness and longing for the outdoors, Elce had fallen ill, and unable to continue at school, Bettina's home had been her refuge.

At present the younger girl was finding it difficult to keep her attention concentrated upon the object of their quest, the city noises so excited and confused her. With her strange musical gift she long had been able to reproduce the country sounds, the singing of certain birds, the wind in the trees, now she seemed faintly aware of some hidden harmony amid the thousand discords of the city streets.

Again her companion brought her back from her day dreaming.

"I believe I will look in the telephone book, as it is just possible Tante may have kept her former telephone number and had it transferred to her new address. If you do not mind waiting, here is a public telephone booth."

Five minutes later with her expression a little more cheerful, Bettina rejoined the younger girl.

"I have discovered an apartment in Fifth Avenue which may be Tante's. At least it is occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burton. As no one answered the telephone, suppose we take the Fifth Avenue bus and see if by a stroke of good fortune we have located the right place. I do hope so. If not, I suppose we can find a quiet hotel and spend the night there, or if not go to a Y.W.C.A. and explain our difficulty. In the morning I fear we must return to Washington and there humbly inquire for Tante's address. I might telegraph of course, but as mother and father are not at home, to find we have vanished before they receive the letter I left for them, will annoy and frighten them. Heigh-ho, it is a puzzling world, Elce dear; when I thought I was attempting a simple journey for a good cause here I am in an entirely unexpected tangle!"

In spite of her uncertainty, for she had but little assurance of finding her guardian, Bettina could not fail to enjoy the ride up Fifth Avenue in the crowded bus. Not yet dark, still here and there lights were shining in the office buildings, while the throngs of people hurrying home grew constantly larger. The bus passed the low, classic stone building she recognized as the New York Public Library, then a group of magnificent houses and hotels and the entrance to Central Park.

At Sixty-first Street and Fifth Avenue Bettina and her companion dismounted.

Half a block further on they entered a handsome apartment building.

"Will you telephone up and ask either Mr. or Mrs. Richard Burton to see Miss Bettina Graham," Bettina asked the elevator boy. "I won't give your name, Elce; it is better that I explain later and the two names might be confusing," she whispered, more uneasy than she cared to confess even to herself.

The reply brought a flush of color to Bettina's cheeks. She was to "come up at once."

"I am afraid I am a good deal relieved. In truth I am so tired I shall tumble into bed as soon as dinner is over and not try to have a long talk with Tante before morning. Probably she would prefer me to wait, as she will soon be leaving for the theater. I hope her apartment is not very small, but

in any case she will have to find room for us to-night," Bettina managed to confide on the way up to the fifth floor.

The moment she had rung the bell, the door opened.

Bettina and Elce found themselves confronting a young man of about eighteen or nineteen years of age.

"Won't you come in? I believe you wish to see my mother. I did not catch your name, but she will be at home in a few moments. The apartment has been deserted all afternoon, but I am sure she won't be much longer away."

An absurd instant Bettina forgot her dignity and the number of her years and suffered an impulse to shed tears. She was tired and it was late. She felt the responsibility for her companion. Of course she should not have rushed to New York in this impetuous fashion without her mother's knowledge, or informing her Camp Fire guardian of her intention.

"You are very kind. I am sorry to have troubled you, but it is not your mother I am looking for. I was afraid I was making a mistake. I am seeking for another Mrs. Richard Burton and merely hoped that this might prove to be her address."

"You are convinced it is not." The young fellow's manner was so kind that Bettina felt slightly less depressed. "Suppose you tell me something of the Mrs. Burton you *do* wish to find, give me some kind of a clue and I may be able to help you."

"Well, I scarcely know how to explain. I came to New York under the impression that Mr. and Mrs. Burton were at a hotel where I know they have been for a number of months and unexpectedly learned they had moved."

"Surely you could have inquired where they have gone!"

Scarcely conscious of how cross and tired she appeared, Bettina frowned.

"Oh, of course I inquired, but the hotel clerk refused to inform me. Mrs. Burton's play this winter is a great success and I suppose so many people have called on her that she felt obliged to refuse to permit her address to be given to strangers, and I was unable to convince the clerk I was an old friend."

Bettina and Elce were about to turn away.

"Do you mean you are trying to discover the Mrs. Burton who is Polly O'Neill Burton, and is acting in the new play known as 'A Tide in the Affairs'? I saw it only a few nights ago. Why do you not go to her theater and inquire where she lives. The theater is at Forty-seventh and Broadway. If you do not receive the information you could wait until Mrs. Burton arrives. I wish you would allow my mother to go with you. If I were only another girl I might be useful. As I am not, I don't dare propose to accompany you. But there are two of you, so I suppose you will be all right, although I don't like the idea of your going to a theater at this hour alone."

Bettina smiled, forgetting in her evident relief to be as conventional as was usual with her.

"I am very much obliged to you. I don't see why I did not think of your suggestion myself. There is no reason to trouble you any further. Of course yours is the proper solution of our difficulty, I knew there must be one if I could only discover it. Good-by and thank you."

An hour later Bettina Graham and Elce were entering an old house in Gramercy Park which recently had been made over into apartments. And within a few moments Mrs. Burton's arms were about Bettina.

"My dear, how lovely it is to see you after so long! But what has brought you here at this hour without letting me know? Surely nothing has happened to Betty or to you! You have not come to tell me your mother is ill and wants me?"

Bettina shook her head.

"No, dear, there is no reason to be uneasy. I simply wish to talk over a question with you, partly because you are my Camp Fire guardian, but more I suppose because you are yourself. I left Washington suddenly and did not think it worth while to telegraph. You see I did not dream you had

moved, or that I would have any difficulty in discovering you. But let me tell you the whole story in the morning. Elce and I are tired and hungry. Can you find a place for us?"

"Don't be absurd, Bettina. Think, dear, I have not seen one of my Camp Fire girls in six months! Come and let us find Richard, he is in the drawing-room; then we will have dinner as I must be off to the theater soon afterwards. We can have a long, uninterrupted talk after breakfast tomorrow."

CHAPTER II

THE GENERATIONS

At ten o'clock the next morning Bettina and Mrs. Burton were in her small sitting-room with the door closed.

The room was characteristic of its owner-filled with warm, soft colors in shades of rose and blue, a few beautiful pieces of furniture, a few photographs, two exquisite paintings on the wall.

In a large chair before the fire, with a small table drawn up beside her, Mrs. Burton had just finished breakfast and was reading her mail, while Bettina wandered about examining the rosewood desk, the pictures, dipping her nose into a blue bowl filled with violets which had arrived not a quarter of an hour before and which Bettina herself had arranged.

"I have a letter from your mother, Princess; she is not writing from Washington and has not yet heard you are with me. However, she says she wishes that we could have a talk together," Mrs. Burton remarked, dropping into the fanciful title the Camp Fire girls had bestowed upon Bettina Graham years before, and which they now only used occasionally.

"Come and make your confession, dear, for besides being by nature curious I can't help being troubled. Surely, Bettina, you have not been falling in love with some one whom your mother does not approve! If so, I am going to be equally difficult. When I became your Camp Fire guardian long ago, and you were all small girls, I never considered the responsibilities that your growing up would thrust upon me, and have often thought of resigning the honor since."

Bettina came and stood before the fire with her hands clasped in front of her and looking down at the older woman, who was gazing up at her half smiling and half frowning.

"I don't see what especial difference your resigning as our Camp Fire guardian would make, Tante. We would all continue to come to you with our problems and you would be wounded and offended should we choose any one else. It is true most of us are growing rather old for the Camp Fire, and yet it has become so important a part of our lives no one of us would dream of giving it up. By the way, you are looking wonderfully well, as if your work were agreeing with you better than I thought possible."

"Yes, I am well, thank you. Is it so difficult to confide what you came to New York to tell me? I don't like to think of your search for me yesterday and the possibility that you might not have found me. When Captain Burton, believing I was seeing too many people, left the order at the hotel I was afraid that some one might come seeking me whom I should regret missing. Won't you sit down?"

Bettina shook her head.

"No, I would rather not. Somehow it is harder to begin my story than I dreamed! You see, I want so much to have you feel as I do about what I am going to tell you, since it means my whole life, and yet I am dreadfully afraid you won't. As you know, mother and I have disagreed about many small matters since I was a little girl. I was obstinate, I suppose, and she never has wholly recovered from her disappointment that I am so unlike her in my disposition and tastes. In the past father and I have seemed to understand each other, until now when he too is not in sympathy with me. Oh, I realize I am coming to my point slowly, but you must let me try and tell you in my own fashion. You care so much for mother I fear your affection for her may prejudice you against me."

"Isn't that a strange speech, Bettina, as if I did not care for you as well, and as if there could be any division of interest between your mother and you?"

The Camp Fire guardian spoke slowly, studying Bettina closely. More than she realized, in the past six months Bettina had changed; she looked older and more serious and did not appear in especially good health. She had grown thinner. Under her eyes were shadows and about her lips discontented lines.

With the first suggestion of criticism her manner had altered.

Years before when Bettina was much younger, during the first months as Sunrise Camp Fire guardian, Mrs. Burton had not understood Bettina's reserve, the little coldness which made her apparently express less affection than the other girls. Later, when this proved to be more shyness than coldness, she had come to believe that, although Bettina did not care for many persons, her affections were deep and abiding and that between them lay a friendship as strong as was possible between a girl and a so much older woman.

"Yes, Bettina has altered more than I dreamed," she reflected.

"I am sorry to hear you say, Tante, that mother and I cannot have an interest apart, because that is exactly what has occurred," Bettina announced. "We have differed, we do still differ upon a question of such importance that I doubt if our old relation can ever be exactly the same. Of course I care for mother as much as I ever cared, although she declines to believe it. She already has said that her affection for me is not the same."

"Nonsense, Bettina," Mrs. Burton answered. "Please tell me what you mean more clearly and be prepared to have me frank with you. If you feel you will be angry unless I agree with you, my opinion will not be of value."

"Oh, I am accustomed to everybody's being frank in their disapproval of me whenever they hear what I wish to do. I do not expect you to agree with me, Tante, but I did hope you would listen to my side of the question and not think me altogether selfish and inconsiderate, which is the family point of view at present."

In Bettina's manner there was a subtle change, her tone less self-assured, her expression showing more appeal and less challenge.

In the same instant Mrs. Burton appreciated that to fail Bettina now was to fail Bettina's mother as well, even to end the long friendship upon which they both depended. Beneath Bettina's assumption of hardness and wilfulness, she was sincerely troubled. Moreover, she was facing some decision vital to her future.

"Come and sit down beside me, dear, you look so tall and old towering above me. And suppose we do not presume in the beginning that we are going to misunderstand each other. You want to confide in me and I am glad you do; now go on and I shall not interrupt."

At the change in her Camp Fire guardian's manner, Bettina's face softened, she seemed younger and gentler. Sitting down on a low chair she leaned forward, placing her clasped hands in the older woman's lap and gazing directly at her with eyes that were clear and gallant, even if they were a little obstinate and cold.

Mrs. Burton experienced a sensation of relief. In Bettina's opposition to her mother there could be nothing seriously wrong.

She began to speak at once:

"Perhaps my confession is not so dreadful as you fear, Tante. The unfortunate thing is that mother and I cannot seem to agree and that we have argued the question so many times until of late we have not only argued but quarreled. Well, I shall begin at the beginning! When we said good-by to one another at Tahawus cabin,[*] I remained at home in Washington for only a few weeks and then mother and I opened our summer house. We both wrote you that she and father and Tony and Marguerite Arnot and I spent several perfect months together motoring and sailing and swimming with one another and with the people who came to see us. David Hale came now and then, and Tony's college friends, besides Washington friends and Sally and Alice Ashton for a few days. There was only one small difficulty. I became intimate with an older woman who was boarding not far away. Mother did not consider her particularly desirable. She was polite to her as she is to most people and did not really object to Miss Merton until she began to feel that she was having more influence over me than she liked. Miss Merton is a settlement worker and used to tell me of her life and the people she is thrown with and the help she is able to give them. I found the account of her work very fascinating,

until mother began to feel I was neglecting my family and preferring Miss Merton's society. This was not true; I did not care so much for Miss Merton herself, although I do admire her. It was her experiences among the poor which interested me so keenly; the clubs and classes and the nursing and the effort to teach our immigrants more of the spirit and opportunities of the United States."

[*] See "Camp Fire Girls at Half Moon Lake".

"Yes, I know, my dear, social settlement work is not a new discovery. Was it to you? What in the world can this have to do with you? Surely your mother did not oppose your friendship with this Miss Merton to such an extent that you have made a tragedy of it!"

"No, of course not. What happened was just this. I became so interested in social settlement work that I have decided it is the work to which I wish to devote my life. I thought over the question for weeks and then I spoke to mother. I told her that I could not possibly do what she desired for me and make my *début* in Washington society this winter. The very idea makes me wretched! I assured her she could not realize what an utter waste of time a society life appears to me. Besides, I am not in any way fitted for it. I asked her to allow me to spend this winter studying social settlement work. Then if I found I could be useful I would choose it as my life work. You know I never have felt that I wished to marry and for the last two years, when we were not busy with the reconstruction work in France I have been more restless than any one realized. I must find my own road, yet I did not know in what direction it lay."

"Yes, well, go on, Bettina," Mrs. Burton urged, smiling a little inwardly and yet conscious of Bettina's immense seriousness, which made her egotism pardonable.

"Well, mother at first simply declined to pay any attention to what I told her. Afterwards when she began to see that I was in earnest she declined to have me mention the subject to her again. She announced that her plans were made; I was to make my *début* early in October and to spend the winter at home. She declared that social settlement work should be left to older people and to girls who had fewer opportunities. She said other things of course, but the important fact is that she refuses to permit me the choice of my own life. Because she cares for society and people and being beautiful and admired is no reason why I should care for the same things. If I were older I should do as I like. Miss Merton has charge of a settlement house on the east side in New York and would take me in to live with her."

Bettina put up her hands to her flushed cheeks.

"I suppose this sounds as if I did not care in the least for what mother wishes, and yet I do. I am sorry to disappoint her; I wish I had been what she desired. Yet I cannot for that reason change my own nature and my own inclinations. Do please say something, Tante; it is not like you to remain silent so long."

"I did not wish to interrupt you and I am feeling sorry for Betty."

"Sorry for mother? Of course I expected you would be; everybody is sorry for her. They always have been sorry that she should have a daughter who has neither her beauty, nor charm, nor sweetness; the fact that I am a failure in society and wish to lead my own life is only one thing more. You need not for a moment suppose that the sympathy is not all with mother. I regret having troubled you. I thought when you were a girl your family and friends were bitterly opposed to your going on the stage and that regardless of them you did the thing you wished. But you are a genius and have proved your right to do as you like. I understand that makes all the difference in the world. It even justifies sacrificing other people."

Hurt and angry, and not sure of her own position, Bettina felt the common impulse to strike at some one else. The moment after her final speech she was sorry to have made it.

"Have I sacrificed other people to have my own way, Bettina? I wonder? If you mean that I returned to the stage in opposition to Aunt Patricia's wish, it is true," Mrs. Burton answered.

"You would not have referred to this had you known how unhappy it has made me. Since we parted at Tahawus cabin Aunt Patricia has never spoken to me or answered one of my letters. She has

not allowed me to see her, although I have been twice to Boston for no other purpose. Yet, Bettina, are the circumstances the same? I do not wish to hurt Aunt Patricia, but I am not a girl by many years, and I chose my profession long ago. I explained that my husband and I needed the money I am able to make and could not continue to accept Aunt Patricia's generosity. She has no real objection to my return to the stage except the mistaken notion that I'm not strong enough and the fact that she cannot allow me to do what her will opposes. Dear Aunt Patricia is nothing, if not an autocrat! Still there are hours when I miss her so much, when it hurts to have her believe me ungrateful, until I almost regret what I have done, pleased as I am at the success of my new play. I often wish I had tried more persuasion with Aunt Patricia. But, Bettina, I never claimed to be a model person, and as you seem to feel I have no right to judge you, suppose we do not discuss your difficulty."

Flushing Bettina bit her lips and lowered her lids over her grey eyes.

"I don't wonder you say that, Tante, and I deserve it. To be rude to you does not help my cause, does it? Certainly it would not with mother. Besides you know I thoroughly approved of your return to the stage and think Aunt Patricia utterly unreasonable. There isn't any likeness between my position and yours in this instance. What I want you to do is to try and think how you felt when you were a girl and all your family and friends opposed your going on the stage. Didn't they tell you that you were selfish and unreasonable and breaking people's hearts from sheer obstinacy? I don't wish to be disagreeable, I have no great talent as you have, I just want you to try to feel a little sympathy for me, even if you feel more for mother."

The Camp Fire guardian smiled and shook her head, yet laid her hand on Bettina's.

"My dear, you are making a more difficult request than you realize. It is so hard to go back to one's past that most of us only understand our own generation. You Camp Fire girls should have taught me more wisdom! Of course I sympathize with you if you are unhappy, Bettina, and feel yourself in the wrong place, yet I am sorrier for your mother, because you cannot possibly realize how much you are hurting her. She never has believed you cared for her deeply and now that you are not willing to spend even one season with her in doing what she wishes, she is the more firmly convinced that you have no affection for her. You talk a great deal of not having your mother's beauty and charm; well, perhaps not in the same degree; but Betty, I know, is very proud of you and thinks you are infinitely cleverer than she and that you feel this yourself."

"Tante, you are not fair," Bettina interrupted.

"Then perhaps you would rather I would not go on."

"Yes, I want to know what you think, only what you have said is absurd. Mother never has been proud of me, although this is scarcely her fault. She agrees with me that I am not a success in society, only she insists that this is because I won't try to make myself popular."

"Do you try?"

"Well, no, not especially, but why should I? If I were allowed to do what I like, to give all my energy and the little knowledge I possess to help people less fortunate than I am, I should try as I have never tried to accomplish anything in my life."

"You are not willing to make any effort to fulfill your mother's wish. Suppose we do not discuss the subject, Bettina, any further at present. We are both tired. I telegraphed your mother last night and am writing to-day to ask if you may make me a visit."

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Burton arose.

"I told you I did not wish to be disturbed," she protested when the door opened and another girl entered.

This girl possessed an apparently colorless manner and personality, she had ash-brown hair and eyes and the question of her appearance would scarcely occur to any one who knew her but slightly. Juliet Temple was not a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire. She had been introduced to the Camp Fire guardian and the group of girls by Mrs. Burton's husband during the winter they had spent together in the Adirondacks.

Not popular with the rest of the household, Juliet Temple had continued to live with Mrs. Burton in a position a little difficult to describe. Treated as a member of the family, she was useful to Mrs. Burton in a variety of ways, in fact she had come to depend upon her far more than she appreciated.

"Yes, I understood that you did not desire to be disturbed, but I think when you know who wishes to see you that you will feel differently," Juliet said quietly.

Accepting the cards that were offered her, Mrs. Burton exclaimed:

"Bettina, you cannot guess who has arrived, unless you have arranged to surprise me! Not to have seen one of you Camp Fire girls in all these months and now to have four of you appear at the same time scarcely seems accidental."

Bettina got up.

"I don't know what you mean!"

The Camp Fire guardian disappeared.

A moment later, returning to her sitting-room she was accompanied by three girls, one of them a tall girl with dusky black hair and eyes and a foreign appearance in spite of the fact that she was an American.

The other two girls were sisters, although utterly unlike in appearance; one of them was tall and slightly angular with gray eyes and reddish hair. The younger girl had golden brown hair and eyes, was small and softly rounded. Her expression at the moment was one of demure happiness.

"Vera Lagerloff, Alice Ashton and Sally Ashton, at your service, Bettina," the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian announced with a curtsy.

"But, Bettina Graham, how in the world do you happen to be in New York at this time?"

Bettina laughed.

"That is exactly the question I was about to ask of you."

CHAPTER III

FUTURE PLANS

"We are spending the winter in New York; actually I have been intending to write you for weeks, Bettina, but have been too busy; Alice and I are taking special courses at Columbia and Sally is here keeping house for us," Vera Lagerloff answered.

"Have I talked so much, Tante, that you have had no opportunity to tell me so important a piece of news?" Bettina inquired.

After finding chairs for her guests, Mrs. Burton had seated herself on a couch beside Sally Ashton. She now shook her head.

"No, Bettina, I could not have told you, since I had no idea the girls were in New York. You see, they have never before been to see me or let me hear where they were. Have you been in town long?"

There was a short, uncomfortable silence.

"About a month; but please let me explain," Alice Ashton said, seeing that the other girls were waiting for her to assume the responsibility of a reply. "I realize this must seem strange to you, and I grant you it does look odd, as if we had lost all our affection and gratitude. And yet you can not believe this of us!"

"I have made no accusation," the Camp Fire guardian returned, yet in her tone and manner there was an unconscious accusation, which made it difficult for Alice to continue.

"I am afraid you are wounded, Tante; I am sorry," she added awkwardly and paused.

Guardian of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls for a number of years, Mrs. Richard Burton, whose professional name was Polly O'Neill Burton, had given up her career on the stage and traveled with the Camp Fire girls in the west. Later when the great war turned the world upside down she had gone with them to Europe accompanied by a wealthy and eccentric spinster, Miss Patricia Lord. After two years in France and a summer in England they had come back to their own country and on account of the Camp Fire guardian's health had spent the preceding winter in the Adirondacks.¹

With the close of the winter Mrs. Burton had returned to the stage and the Camp Fire girls to their homes. There had been no meeting between them until to-day.

"Tante" was the title which the greater number of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls used in speaking to their guardian.

"Please don't behave as if you were too wounded to be angry," Sally Ashton remonstrated, moving closer to the older woman and slipping an arm about her. "And please remember that it is a good deal more of a trial for your Camp Fire girls to have been separated from you for all these months than for you to have had a brief rest from their society. Some of us at least realize that you have given too much of yourself to us for the last few years when a so much larger public needed you. I can't tell you how proud I am of your latest success. I have read dozen of notices in the papers and the critics all say that you are more wonderful than ever."

Mrs. Burton smiled.

"You are very complimentary, Sally dear, and of course I am immensely flattered. Nevertheless this does not explain why you girls have never come near me for a month, or taken the trouble to write or telephone. This would not have interfered seriously with the holiday which you seem to feel I have required."

Rising, Alice Ashton came over and stood before her guardian, her expression unusually gentle and affectionate. Ordinarily Alice was not tactful, although sincerity and a fine sense of honor were her ruling characteristics.

¹ See "Camp Fire Girls" Series.

"See here, Tante, we are in an uncomfortable position and there is nothing to do save tell you the entire story and let you judge. You will say frankly whether you think we have been right or wrong. I feel sure that Sally and Vera have felt as I do, when I say there has scarcely been a day since our arrival in New York when we have not thought of you and longed to see you. We have been to your play several times."

"Why avoid me, dear? What can it be that you find so difficult to say? I prefer to know."

"Even if the reason will trouble you more than the fact? The truth is that Aunt Patricia would not agree to have us see you."

"So Aunt Patricia's influence is stronger than your feeling for me! Perhaps that is as it should be, but I can not altogether recognize what I have done which makes Aunt Patricia not only refuse to have anything to do with me herself, but wish to separate you Camp Fire girls from me as well. I suppose she fears I may affect you with the ingratitude and obstinacy I possess. As long as you were so compliant with Aunt Patricia's wish, Alice, why did you change? Aunt Patricia has not changed!"

"You are angry and hurt and I don't know how to go on," Alice returned, her gray blue eyes darkening, a flush coming into her cheeks.

"Then don't try, Alice," Sally interrupted. "Tante, please be sensible and don't make a tragedy over a situation that is uncomfortable enough for us all, goodness knows! I have no gift of words but at least I can speak plainly. Alice and Vera both feel under obligation to Aunt Patricia because she is paying their expenses in New York this winter. I have not been here so long as they have, in fact I only arrived a few days ago. Aunt Patricia has rented a lovely little apartment for us and is being generous as only she can be. So when she asked Alice and Vera not to come to see you, they considered that in a way they were obliged to do as she asked; I had no such feeling. Aunt Patricia has been spending a few days with us and this morning at breakfast, I had the matter out with her. I simply told her I was coming to call on you, that she of course must do as she liked, but that I had been caring for you all my life and had no idea of ever doing anything else. If she did not wish me to remain on at the apartment, she could of course send me home."

"Bravo, Sally!" Bettina Graham said softly under her breath.

"Of course," Sally added, "Alice and Vera have a different attitude toward Aunt Patricia. I have never been a favorite with her, as they have, or lived alone with her during their reconstruction work in France. My own opinion is that Aunt Patricia wants to see you so much herself that she is unwilling to have us see you, for fear we shall talk of you afterwards. She made it a stipulation this morning when she agreed we could come to see you that your name was not to be mentioned in her presence. I really am awfully sorry for her. She is very lonely this winter I am afraid, shut up in her big house near Boston. She cares for you more than any one in the world, and only comes to New York occasionally, I really believe to find out how you are, although no one of us has been able to discover if she has been to see you act."

During Sally Ashton's long speech neither her sister, Alice, nor Vera Lagerloff had appeared particularly serene.

Vera Lagerloff was an unusual looking girl; at Sally's words, her eyes narrowed, her skin paled slightly and her lips parted over her firm, white teeth. In all the years of their Camp Fire life together, no one of her companions had ever seen Vera seriously angry, although she always insisted that notwithstanding her American birth, she shared the Russian peculiarity.

She looked more aggrieved at this moment than was customary.

"Sally is making a good story so far as she is concerned, although not so fortunate a one for us," she commented. "Still the worst of it is, Mrs. Burton, that Alice and I cannot altogether deny the truth of what she has told you." (Vera was always more formal in her manner toward the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian than the other girls, and rarely used the title of "Tante.") "We do feel under obligation to Aunt Patricia; neither Alice nor I could have afforded the winter at Columbia save for her kindness. Yet she did not insist on our not coming to see you, or letting you hear from us. She merely asked it

as a favor, and only for a limited length of time. One of the reasons she gave was that you had chosen to separate yourself from us in order to give your time and energy to your stage career and that we should not interfere. Alice and I were merely waiting to decide what was wisest and best."

"Very well, I understand; please let us not discuss the question any further. Of course, Vera, dear, I know Aunt Patricia also told you I would be an unfortunate influence, but you are perfectly right not to speak of this. Do tell me what you and Alice are studying at Columbia and whether you like New York and, oh, dozens of other things!"

The Camp Fire guardian's manner was sweet and friendly as her arm encircled Sally and she gave her an affectionate embrace.

Sally dimpled and smiled.

"You are a prophet, Tante. Aunt Patricia suggested only this morning that in order to have your own way, you disregarded every one's wishes. The implication was that I bore a slight, but unfortunate resemblance to you."

At this the other girls laughed and the atmosphere cleared.

"Alice is preparing to study medicine and I am taking a course in architecture and another in domestic science. Aunt Patricia talks sometimes of returning to France and spending the rest of her days over there at her home for French war orphans. She says if we wish and our parents agree she may take Alice and me with her."

Sally Ashton shook her head.

"Don't worry, Tante, Aunt Patricia will never leave this country without you."

Mrs. Burton, who had been glancing into the flames which flickered in a small open fire, now looked up.

"Really, Alice and Vera, I am glad you have done what Aunt Patricia wished, although at first I confess I was hurt and angry. If she needs you, you must fill her life as completely as you can. I don't agree with Sally, much as I would like to. Aunt Patricia is singularly unforgiving and must have lost all affection for me. You'll stay to lunch with us. You and Bettina have not had a moment's conversation and she has a great deal to tell you. I'll go and see about things."

After the Camp Fire guardian had disappeared from the room, Bettina Graham slipped into her place beside Sally.

"Do come and sit close to us in a Camp Fire square, if not a Camp Fire circle," Bettina urged. "If you girls only knew how glad I am to see you and how your being here in New York makes me more than ever anxious to do what I have been planning! You know how I always have hated the idea of making my *début* in society. Well, as the ordeal has drawn nearer, I have found myself hating the possibility more than ever. This summer while we were at our new home, that we call 'The House by the Blue Lagoon,' I at last made up my mind what I really wish to do. I want to devote my life to social work and to begin by studying social settlement work in New York this winter."

Sally Ashton sighed.

"Oh, dear, how did I ever wander into so serious a Camp Fire group? Is there no one of the Sunrise girls who does not wish for a career save me? Of course there are Peggy and Gerry, but they already have chosen matrimony as their careers."

"Do be quiet, Sally. What a perfectly delightful idea, Bettina dear! Why can't you spend the winter with us? We have another small bed-room in our apartment and I am sure Aunt Patricia will be delighted to have you with us," Alice Ashton urged.

Bettina shook her head.

"No such good fortune, Alice! Mother is entirely opposed to my wish and insists upon my following her desire for me. I ran away to New York to try to persuade Tante to use her influence with mother to permit me to do what I like, but I find she takes mother's point of view altogether. We were discussing the subject when you came in and she had just told me she thought it would be selfish

and inconsiderate of me to argue the matter any further. So I suppose I must go back to Washington and be a wallflower all winter.

"I forgot to tell you that Elce, our little Lancashire girl, is here with me. She was ill at school and sent to me, as no one seemed able to find anything the matter, save that she was so homesick and miserable. Now something has to be done for her and with her and I am so glad to have the opportunity to ask your advice. I am afraid that to send her to another boarding school would be to have the same thing occur, and yet she must have some education. She cares for nothing save her music and the outdoors and was perfectly well and happy when she was with mother and me last summer."

A moment the three girls remained silent, then Sally answered.

"If you and Tante think it wise and Alice and Vera and Aunt Patricia are willing, why not have Elce come and live with us this winter? I know she would rather be with you, Bettina, but if you are to be introduced into society in Washington, you will scarcely be able to give any time to her. Besides, your mother may not wish to have her. Elce can go to school in New York and I'll look after her otherwise. Perhaps this is not the best thing for her, but it is the only solution I can suggest. She won't be so homesick with us as at boarding school and she will have greater freedom, then I shall like to feel that I am doing something useful."

"Good gracious, Sally, isn't making a home for Alice and me being useful?" Vera remonstrated. "I am sorry if I seemed cross a few moments ago; this was largely because you were in the right and Alice and I did not enjoy our position."

Before any one could reply there was a knock at the door and another girl entered.

"Mrs. Burton says that luncheon is ready if you will be kind enough to come in. I am going to ask you not to stay long afterwards; Mrs. Burton would not mention it I am sure, but she is supposed to lie down every afternoon for a short rest."

As the four Camp Fire girls followed Juliet Temple out of the room, Sally managed to whisper to Bettina:

"What is there about Juliet Temple that is so annoying? That little speech she just made is the kind of thing that makes me especially angry, as if she were far more intimate with Tante and more devoted to her welfare than any of her Camp Fire girls? I suppose she is devoted to her and certainly she makes herself useful and yet I never feel sure of her. In my opinion she represents one of the causes of Aunt Patricia's estrangement."

Bettina shook her head.

"I feel a good deal as you do, Sally, although I am not even so confident of the reason. Sometimes I think you are a better judge of character than any of the rest of us, so if you have an opportunity this winter I wish you would study Juliet Temple and find out what you can. Is she really devoted to Tante, or is she only devoted to her for what she thinks she can gain? Come, we must not keep luncheon waiting and I want you to see Elce. Suppose we talk to her of your proposal."

CHAPTER IV

NATURAL HISTORY

Mrs. Burton's New York apartment was not large.

In her present state of mind Bettina Graham was restless, so, as her mother had consented that she spend the week with her Camp Fire guardian, she devoted many hours each day to being out of doors and to sight seeing.

She was never alone; one of her excuses was that Elce must be amused and not allowed to be troublesome. The little English girl, the daughter of a Lancashire miner, who had been deserted by her father and in a way thrust upon the Camp Fire girls during a brief visit to Ireland, always accompanied her.

Elce was not a trying companion when one wished to pursue one's own train of thought. She talked but little and seemed shy and not particularly clever save for her extraordinary musical gift. Not that she had any gift for the technique of music. One of Bettina's puzzles and disappointments was that so far the younger girl had failed to show any proper interest in the study of music. Her talent seemed spontaneous and natural as a bird's ability to sing and she seemed as little capable of acquiring musical knowledge.

Undoubtedly a problem, Bettina believed that Elce was chiefly her problem. During the summer in "Merrie England," when the little girl had been a maid of all work in their household, she first had become interested in her and in return Elce, whom they then knew by the Lancashire title of "Chitty," had given her a devotion, which she revealed toward no one else. Indeed, the younger girl appeared curiously free from the ordinary affections and to be strangely shy, or self-contained.

It was at Bettina's request that her father had undertaken to pay for the little girl's education. There had been no thought of making her a member of their household, save perhaps during certain holidays.

With Marguerite Arnot the circumstances were different. Marguerite was older and in spite of her difficult background of poverty and hard work² was possessed of unusual beauty and charm. Then at once Marguerite had responded to her mother's influence. Indeed, Bettina, although recognizing the unreasonableness of her own attitude, frequently had to stifle pangs of something approaching jealousy at the sympathetic relation between them.

Marguerite was no longer shy save in a graceful and attractive fashion. If she played but an inconspicuous part in the social life now surrounding her, she had the French tact and resourcefulness. It seemed to Bettina that, as her own difference of opinion with her mother had grown and developed, Marguerite was beginning to fill her place. In justice she could not criticize Marguerite for circumstances with which she had nothing to do, although not enjoying the idea that her mother was turning to some one else for the sympathy and devotion which should have been her own to give and to receive.

This afternoon, wandering about the Natural History Museum with Elce, Bettina was not particularly intent upon the exhibitions, but instead was planning a letter which she contemplated writing home later in the evening, when Mrs. Burton had gone to the theater and she could be alone.

She meant to surrender her own desire; nothing else appeared possible, but she also wished her family to appreciate that she believed she was being treated unjustly and that she had the right to her own choice of life.

Reaching a secluded corner and discovering an unoccupied bench, Bettina sat down, suggesting that Elce wander about alone and come back for her later. They were on the floor devoted to the

² See "Camp Fire Girls in Glorious France."

reproduction of wild birds in their native haunts. Since the collection was a rarely beautiful one, Bettina believed it would be of so great fascination as to keep the younger girl occupied for some time. Personally she was already fatigued. Moreover, she wished for an opportunity to think without the possibility of being interrupted at any moment.

After her original talk with her Camp Fire guardian she had not referred to the subject of their interview. There was little reason why she should. Definitely she understood that Mrs. Burton's sympathy was with her mother and that she had but scant patience with her rebellion against what might appear to most girls as a singularly fortunate fate.

Bettina was not only disappointed, but puzzled and aggrieved. From any one save her Camp Fire guardian she would have expected such a point of view. She herself was able to accept the fact that it was but natural other people should consider an opportunity to enter Washington society, chaperoned by her mother and with her father's prominent official position, to be the summit of any natural girl's desire. Yet from her Camp Fire guardian Bettina had hoped for another viewpoint. Had she not heard her oftentimes insist that every living human being must follow his or her own road, and that whether for good or ill she could have followed no career save the one she had chosen.

The difference in their positions Bettina Graham had far too much intelligence not to recognize. She was not choosing the career of an artist and had revealed no exceptional gifts. She merely wanted to give her life in service to persons less fortunate than herself, rather than waste it, as she felt, in a society existence for which she had neither liking nor taste. There was nothing romantic nor inspiring in her desire. Her mother and father were both convinced that such work should be left to older women, or to girls who possessed neither her position nor opportunities.

So since the prop upon which unconsciously she had been leaning, Mrs. Burton's approval and help, had failed her, Bettina decided to make no further protest for the present. Later she must convince her family that her desire was not a whim, a moment's caprice, the influence of a stronger personality, which would vanish when other interests became more absorbing.

Suddenly Bettina got up, realizing that the room in which she was seated was growing surprisingly dark and that a guard was moving about, announcing that the hour for closing had arrived.

Before leaving Bettina had first to find her companion.

At the farther end of the room she observed that a small crowd had formed, who seemed loath to depart.

Drawing near, to her amazement she heard a number of beautiful, birdlike notes with which she was familiar.

Undisturbed by her audience, Elce was standing by a showcase filled with birds from the northern part of England, birds which the little girl had known almost from babyhood, as she had spent the greater part of her time in the woods. To-day amid strange and different surroundings, with apparent unconsciousness, she was repeating such bird notes as she could recall.

The crowd about her was amused and admiring.

Bettina laid her hand on the younger girl's shoulder.

"Elce, we must go at once, it is growing late. And you must remember you are not in the woods, or you will have so large an audience surrounding us some day that we shall not be able to make our escape. You are an odd child! I thought you were exceptionally shy and afraid of people, and now you do a surprising thing like this and appear not in the least abashed."

In farewell Elce was nodding to several persons who had been standing near. She appeared entirely unaware that her behavior had been unusual.

Out in the street Bettina discovered that the darkness had not been due solely to the lateness of the hour, but that a thunderstorm was approaching.

A few moments she stood hesitating. The History Museum was on the west side of the city and uptown and she wished to reach the east side and down town as promptly as possible. By what method

she could most quickly accomplish this result she was not certain. Holding tight to her companion's hand Bettina made a hurried rush toward the Broadway subway.

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