

Penrose Margaret

The Campfire Girls of Roselawn: or, a Strange Message from the Air



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Penrose M.

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CHAPTER I

THEY HEAR A VOICE

“Oh, it’s wonderful, Amy! Just wonderful!”

The blonde girl in the porch swing looked up with shining eyes and flushed face from her magazine to look at the dark girl who swung composedly in a rocking chair, her nimble fingers busy with the knitting of a shoulder scarf. The dark girl bobbed her head in agreement.

“So’s the Sphinx, but it’s awfully out of date, Jess.”

Jessie Norwood looked offended. “Did I ever bring to your attention, Miss Drew—”

“Why don’t you say ‘drew’ to my attention?” murmured the other girl.

“Because I perfectly loathe puns,” declared Jessie, with energy.

“Good! Miss Seymour’s favorite pupil. Go on about the wonder beast, Jess.”

“It is no beast, I’d have you understand. And it is right up to date – the very newest thing.”

“My dear Jessie,” urged her chum, gayly, “you have tickled my curiosity until it positively wriggles! What is the wonder?”

“Radio!”

“Oh! Wireless?”

“Wireless telephone. Everybody is having one.”

“Grandma used to prescribe sulphur and molasses for that.”

“Do be sensible for once, Amy Drew. You and Darry—”

“That reminds me. Darry knows all about it.”

“About what?”

“The radio telephone business. You know he was eighteen months on a destroyer in the war, even if he was only a kid. You know,” and Amy giggled, “he says that if women’s ages are always elastic, it was no crime for him to stretch his age when he enlisted. Anyhow, he knows all about the ‘listening boxes’ down in the hold. And that is all this radio is.”

“Oh, but Amy!” cried Jessie, with a toss of her blond head, “that is old stuff. The radio of today is very different – much improved. Anybody can have a receiving set and hear the most wonderful things out of the air. It has been brought to every home.”

“Have you a little radio in your home?” chuckled Amy, her fingers still flying.

“Dear me, Amy, you are so difficult,” sighed her chum.

“Not at all, not at all,” replied the other girl. “You can understand me, just as e-e-easy! But you know, Jess, I have to act as a brake for your exuberance.”

“Don’t care,” declared Jessie. “I’m going to have one.”

“If cook isn’t looking, bring one for me, too,” suggested the irrepressible joker.

“I mean to have a radio set,” repeated Jessie quite seriously. “It says in this magazine article that one can erect the aerials and all, oneself. And place the instrument. I am going to do it.”

“Sure you can,” declared Amy, with confidence. “If you said you could rebuild the Alps – and improve on them – I’d root for you, honey.”

“I don’t want any of your joking,” declared Jessie, with emphasis. “I am in earnest.”

“So am I. About the Alps. Aunt Susan, who went over this year, says the traveling there is just as rough as it was before the war. She doesn’t see that the war did any good. If I were you, Jess, and thought of making over the Alps—”

“Now, Amy Drew! Who said anything about the Alps?”

“I did,” confessed her chum. “And I was about to suggest that, if you tackle the job of rebuilding them, you flatten ’em out a good bit so Aunt Susan can get across them easier.”

“Amy Drew! Will you ever have sense?”

“What is it, a conundrum? Something about ‘Take care of the dollars and the cents will take care of themselves?’”

“I am talking about installing a radio set in our house. And if you don’t stop funning and help me do it, I won’t let you listen in, so there!”

“I’ll be good,” proclaimed Amy at once. “I enjoy gossip just as much as the next one. And if you can get it out of the air—”

“It has to be sent from a broadcasting station,” announced Jessie.

“There’s one right in this town,” declared Amy, with vigor.

“No!”

“Yes, I tell you. She lives in the second house from the corner of Breen Street, the yellow house with green blinds—”

“Now, Amy! Listen here! Never mind local gossips. They only broadcast neighborhood news. But we can get concerts and weather reports and lectures—”

Amy painfully writhed in her chair at this point. “Say not so, Jess!” she begged. “Get lectures enough at school – and from dad, once in a while, when the dear thinks I go too far.”

“I think you go too far most of the time,” declared her chum primly. “Nobody else would have the patience with you that I have.”

“Except Burd Alling,” announced Amy composedly. “He thinks I am all right.”

“Pooh! Whoever said Burd Alling had good sense?” demanded Jessie. “Now listen!” She read a long paragraph from the magazine article. “You see, it is the very latest thing to do. Everybody is doing it. And it is the most wonderful thing!”

Amy had listened with more seriousness. She could be attentive and appreciative if she wished. The paragraph her chum read was interesting.

“Go ahead. Read some more,” she said. “Is that all sure enough so, Jess?”

“Of course it is so. Don’t you see it is printed here?”

“You mustn’t believe everything you see in print, Jess. My grandfather was reported killed in the Civil War, and he came home and pointed out several things they had got wrong in the newspaper obituary – especially the date of his demise. Now this—”

“I am going to get a book about it, and that will tell us just what to do in getting a radio set established.”

“I’ll tell you the first thing to do,” scoffed Amy. “Dig down into your pocketbook.”

“It won’t cost much. But I mean to have a good one.”

“All right, dear. I am with you. Never let it be said I deserted Poll. What is the first move?”

“Now, let me see,” murmured Jessie, staring off across the sunflecked lawn.

The Norwood estate was a grand place. The house, with its surrounding porches, stood in Roselawn upon a knoll with several acres of sloping sod surrounding it and a lovely little lake at the side. There was a long rose garden on either side of the house, and groups of summer roses in front. Roses, roses, roses, everywhere about the place! The Norwoods all loved them.

But there were more roses in this section of the pretty town of New Melford, and on that account many inhabitants of the place had gotten into the habit of calling the estates bordering the boulevard by the name of Roselawn. It was the Roselawn district, for every lawn was dotted with roses, red, pink, white, and yellow.

The Norwoods were three. Jessie, we put first because to us she is of the most importance, and her father and mother would agree. Being the only child, it is true they made much of her. But Jessie Norwood was too sweet to be easily spoiled.

Her father was a lawyer in New York, which was twenty miles from New Melford. The Norwoods had some wealth, which was good. They had culture, which was better. And they were a very loving and companionable trio, which was best.

Across the broad, shaded boulevard was a great, rambling, old house, with several broad chimneys. It had once been a better class farmstead. Mr. Wilbur Drew, who was likewise a lawyer, had rebuilt and added to and improved and otherwise transformed the farmhouse until it was an attractive and important-looking dwelling.

In it lived the lawyer and his wife, his daughter, Amy, and Darrington Drew, when he was home from college. This was another happy family – in a way. Yet they were just a little different from the Norwoods. But truly “nice people.”

When Amy Drew once gave her mind to a thing she could be earnest enough. The little her chum had read her from the magazine article began to interest her. Besides, whatever Jessie was engaged in must of necessity hold the attention of Amy.

She laid aside the knitting and went to sit beside Jessie in the swing. They turned back to the beginning of the article and read it through together, their arms wound about each other in immemorial schoolgirl fashion.

Of course, as Amy pointed out, they were not exactly schoolgirls now. They were out of school – since two days before. The long summer vacation was ahead of them. Time might hang idly on their hands. So it behooved them to find something absorbing to keep their attention keyed up to the proper pitch.

“Tell you what,” Amy suggested. “Let’s go down town to the bookstore and see if they have laid in a stock of this radio stuff. We want one or two of the books mentioned here, Jess. We are two awfully smart girls, I know; we will both admit it. But some things we have positively got to learn.”

“Silly,” crooned Jessie, patting her chum on the cheek. “Let’s go. We’ll walk. Wait till I run and see if Momsy doesn’t want something from down town.”

“We won’t ask Mrs. Drew that question, for she will be pretty sure to want a dozen things, and I refuse – positively – to be a dray horse. I ‘have drew’ more than my share from the stores already. Cyprian in the car can run the dear, forgetful lady’s errands.”

Jessie scarcely listened to this. She ran in and ran out again. She was smiling.

“Momsy says all she wants is two George Washington sundaes, to be brought home in two separate parcels, one blonde and one brunette,” and she held up half a dollar before Amy’s eyes.

“Your mother, as I have always said, Jess, is of the salt of the earth. And she is well sugared, too. Let me carry the half dollar, honey. You’ll swallow it, or lose it, or something. Aren’t to be trusted yet with money,” and Amy marched down the steps in the lead.

She always took the lead, and usually acted as though she were the moving spirit of the pair. But, really, Jessie Norwood was the more practical, and it was usually her initiative that started the chums on a new thing and always her “sticktoitiveness” that carried them through to the end.

Bonwit Boulevard, beautifully laid out, shaded with elms, with a grass path in the middle, two oiled drives, and with a bridle path on one side, was one of the finest highways in the state. At this hour of the afternoon, before the return rush of the auto-commuters from the city, the road was almost empty.

The chums chatted of many things as they went along. But Jessie came back each time to radio. She had been very much interested in the wonder of it and in the possibility of rigging the necessary aerials and setting up a receiving set at her own house.

“We can get the books to tell us how to do it, and we can buy the wire for the antenna to-day,” she said.

“‘Antenna’! Is it an insect?” demanded Amy. “Sounds crawly.”

“Those are the aerials—”

“Listen!” interrupted Amy Drew.

A sound – a shrill and compelling voice – reached their ears. Amy’s hand clutched at Jessie’s arm and held her back. There was nobody in sight, and the nearest house was some way back from the road.

“What is it?” murmured Jessie.

“Help! He-e-elp!” repeated the voice, shrilly.

“Radio!” muttered Amy, sepulchrally. “It is a voice out of the air.”

There positively was nobody in sight. But Jessie Norwood was practical. She knew there was a street branching off the boulevard just a little way ahead. Besides, she heard the throbbing of an automobile engine.

“Help!” shrieked the unknown once more.

“It is a girl,” declared Jessie, beginning to run and half dragging Amy Drew with her. “She is in trouble! We must help her!”

CHAPTER II

A ROAD MYSTERY

Like a great many other beautiful streets, there was a poverty-stricken section, if sparsely inhabited, just behind Bonwit Boulevard. A group of shacks and squatters' huts down in a grassy hollow, with a little brook flowing through it to the lake, and woods beyond. It would not have been an unsightly spot if the marks of the habitation of poor and careless folk had been wiped away.

But at the moment Jessie Norwood and her chum, Amy Drew, darted around from the broad boulevard into the narrow lane that led down to this poor hamlet, neither of the girls remembered "Dogtown," as the group of huts was locally called. The real estate men who exploited Roselawn and Bonwit Boulevard as the most aristocratic suburban section of New Melford, never spoke of Dogtown.

"What do you suppose is the matter, Jess?" panted Amy.

"It's a girl in trouble! Look at that!"

The chums did not have to go even as far as the brow of the hill overlooking the group of houses before mentioned. The scene of the action of this drama was not a hundred yards off the boulevard.

A big touring car stood in the narrow lane, headed toward the broad highway from which Jessie and Amy had come. It was a fine car, and the engine was running. A very unpleasant looking, narrow-shouldered woman sat behind the steering wheel, but was twisted around in her seat so that she could look behind her.

In the lane was another woman. Both were expensively dressed, though not tastefully; and this second woman was as billowy and as generously proportioned as the one behind the wheel was lean. She was red-faced, too, and panted from her exertions.

Those exertions, it was evident at once to Jessie and Amy, were connected with the capturing and the subsequent restraining of a very active and athletic girl of about the age of the chums. She was quite as red-faced as the fleshy woman, and she was struggling with all her might to get away, while now and then she emitted a shout for help that would have brought a crowd in almost no time in any place more closely built up.

"Oh! What is the matter?" repeated Amy.

"Bring her along, Martha!" exclaimed the woman already in the motor-car. "Here come a couple of rubber-necks."

This expression, to Jessie's mind, marked the driver of the automobile for exactly what she was. Nor did the face of the fat woman impress the girl as being any more refined.

As for the girl struggling with the second woman – the one called "Martha" – she was not very well dressed. But she looked neat and clean, and she certainly was determined not to enter the automobile if she could help it. Jessie doubted, although she had at first thought it possible, if either of these women were related to the girl they seemed so determined to capture.

"What are they – road pirates? Kidnapers?" demanded Amy. "What?"

The two chums stopped by the machine. They really did not know what to do. Should they help the screaming girl? Or should they aid the fleshy woman? It might be that the girl had run away from perfectly good guardians. Only, to Jessie's mind, there was something of the refinement that pertained to the girl lacking in the appearance of these two women. She was not favorably impressed by them.

"What is the matter with the girl?" she asked the woman in the car.

Although she said it politely, the woman flashed her a scowling glance and said:

"Mind your own business!"

"My!" gasped Amy at this, her eyes opening very wide.

Jessie was not at all reassured. She turned to the fleshy woman, and repeated her question:

"What is the matter with the girl?"

“She’s crazy, that’s what she is!” cried the woman. “She doesn’t know what is good for her.”

“I’ll learn her!” rasped out the driver of the car.

“Don’t!” shouted the girl. “Don’t let them take me back there—”

Just then the fleshy woman got behind her. She clutched the girl’s shoulders and drove her harshly toward the car with her whole weight behind the writhing girl. The other woman jumped out of the car, seized the girl by one arm, and together the women fairly threw their captive into the tonneau of the car, where she fell on her hands and knees.

“There, spiteful!” gasped the lean woman. “I’ll show you!”

She hopped back behind the steering wheel. The fleshy woman climbed into the tonneau and held the still shrieking girl. The car started with a dash, the door of the tonneau flapping.

“Oh! This isn’t right!” gasped Jessie.

“They are running away with her, Jess,” murmured Amy. “Isn’t it exciting?”

“It’s mean!” declared her chum with conviction. “How dare they?”

“Why, to look at her, I think that skinny woman would dare anything,” remarked Amy. “And – haven’t – you seen her before?”

“Never! She doesn’t live around here. And that car is strange.”

The car had turned into the boulevard and headed out of town. When the girls walked back to the broad highway it was out of sight. It was being driven with small regard for the speed laws.

“I guess you are right,” reflected Amy. “I never saw that car before. It is a French car. But the woman’s face—”

“There was enough of that to remember,” declared Jessie, quite spitefully.

“I didn’t mean the fat woman’s face,” giggled Amy. “I mean that the other woman looked familiar. Maybe I have seen her picture somewhere.”

“If my face was like hers I’d never have it photographed,” snapped Jessie.

“How vinegarish,” said Amy. “Well, it was funny.”

“You do find humor in the strangest things,” returned her chum. “I guess that poor girl didn’t think it was funny.”

“Of course, they had some right to her,” Amy declared.

“How do you know they did? They did not act so,” returned the more thoughtful Jessie. “If they had really the right to make the poor girl go with them, they would not have acted in such haste nor answered me the way they did.”

“Well, of course, it wasn’t any of our business either to ask questions or to interfere,” Amy declared.

“I don’t know about that, Amy,” rejoined her chum. “I wish your brother had been here, or somebody.”

“Darry!” scoffed Amy.

“Or maybe Burd Alling,” and Jessie’s eyes twinkled.

“Well,” considered Amy demurely, “I suppose the boys might have known better what to do.”

“Oh,” said Jessie, promptly, “I knew what to do, all right; only I couldn’t do it.”

“What is that?”

“Stopped the women and made them explain before we allowed them to take the girl away. And I wonder where she was going. When and where did she run away from the women? Did you hear her beg us not to let them take her back – back—”

“Back where?”

“That is it, exactly,” sighed Jessie, as the two walked on toward town. “She did not tell us where.”

“Some institution, maybe. An orphan asylum,” suggested Amy.

“Did you think she looked like an orphan?”

“How does an orphan look?” giggled Amy. “I don’t know any except the *Molly Mickford* kind in the movies, and they are always too appealing for words!”

“Somehow, she didn’t look like that,” admitted Jessie.

“She fought hard. I believe I would have scratched that fat woman’s face myself, if I’d been her. Anyway, she wasn’t in any uniform. Don’t they always put orphans in blue denim?”

“Not always. And that girl would have looked awful in blue. She was too dark. She wasn’t very well dressed, but her clothes and their colors were tasteful.”

“Aren’t you the observing thing,” agreed Amy. “She was dressed nicely. And those women were never guards from an institution.”

“Oh, no!”

“It was a private kidnaping party, I guess,” said Amy.

“And we let it go on right under our noses and did not stop it,” sighed Jessie Norwood. “I’m going to tell my father about it.”

Amy grinned elfishly. “He will tell you that you had a right, under the law, to stop those women and make them explain.”

“Ye-es. I suppose so. But a right to do a thing and the ability to do it, he will likewise tell me, are two very different things.”

“Wisdom from the young owl!” laughed Amy. “Well, I don’t suppose, after all, it is any of our business, or ever will be. The poor thing is now a captive and being borne away to the dungeon-keep. Whatever that is,” she added, shrugging her shoulders.

CHAPTER III

INTEREST IN RADIO SPREADS

Over the George Washington sundaes at the New Melford Dainties Shop the girls discussed the mysterious happening on Dogtown Lane until it was, as Amy said, positively frayed.

"We do not know what it was all about, my dear, so why worry our minds? We shall probably never see that girl again, or those two women. Only, that lean one – well! I know I have seen her somewhere, or somebody who looks like her."

"I don't see but you are just as bad as I am," Jessie Norwood said. "But we did not come to town because of that puzzling thing."

"No-o. We came to get these perfectly gorgeous sundaes," declared Amy Drew. "Your mother, Jess, is almost as nice as you are."

"We came in to get radio books and buy wire and stops and all that for the aerals, anyway. Of course, I shall have to send for most of the parts of the house set. There is no regular radio equipment dealer in New Melford."

"Oh, yes! Wireless!" murmured Amy. "I had almost forgotten that."

They trotted across the street to the bookstore. Motors were coming up from the station now, and from New York. They waved their hands to several motoring acquaintances, and just outside Ye Craftsman's Bookshop they ran into Nell Stanley, who they knew had no business at all there on Main Street at this hour of the afternoon. Nell was the minister's daughter, and there were a number of little motherless Stanleys at the parsonage (Amy said "a whole raft of them") who usually needed the older sister's attention, approaching supper time.

"Oh, I've a holiday," laughed Nell, who was big and strong and really handsome, Jessie thought, her coloring was so fresh, her chestnut hair so abundant, her gray eyes so brilliantly intelligent, and her teeth so dazzling. "Aunt Freda is at the house and she and the Reverend told me to go out and not to show myself back home for hours."

"Bully-good!" declared Amy. "You'll come home to dinner with me, and we will spend the evening with Jess helping her build a radio thing so we can do without buying the *New Melford Tribune* to get the local news."

"Oh, Jess, dear, *are* you going to have a radio?" cried Nell. "It's just wonderful. Reverend says he may have to broadcast his sermons pretty soon or else be without an audience."

The pet name by which she usually spoke of her father, the Reverend Doctor Stanley, sounded all right when Nell said it. Nobody else ever called the good clergyman by it. But Nell was something between a daughter and a wife to the hard working Doctor Stanley. And she certainly was a thoughtful and "mothering" sister to the little ones.

"But," Nell added, "you are too late inviting me to the eats, Amy, honey. It can't be done. I'm promised. Mr. Brandon and his wife saw me first, and I am to dine with them. Then they are going to take me in their car out to the Parkville home of their daughter – Oh, say! If your radio isn't finished, Jess, why can't you and Amy come with us? The Brandon car is big enough. And they tell me Mrs. Brandon's daughter has got a perfectly wonderful set at her home. They have an amplifier, and you don't have to use phones at all. Has your radio set got an amplifier, Jess?"

"But I haven't got it yet," cried Jess. "I only hope to have it."

"Then you and Amy come and hear a real one," said Nell.

"If the Brandons won't mind. Will they?"

"You know they are the loveliest people," said Nell briskly. "Mrs. Brandon told me to invite some young friends. But I hadn't thought of doing so. But I must have you and Amy. We'll be along for you girls at about seven-forty-five, new time."

“Then we must hurry,” declared Jess, as the minister’s daughter ran away.

“I’m getting interested,” announced Amy. “Is this radio business like a talking machine?”

“Only better,” said her chum. “Come on. I know several of the little books I want to get. I wrote down the names.”

They dived down the four steps into the basement bookshop. It was a fine place to browse, when one had an hour to spare. But the chums from Roselawn were not in browsing mood on this occasion.

They knew exactly what they wanted – at least, Jessie Norwood did – and somewhat to their surprise right near the front door of the shop was a “radio table.”

“Oh, yes, young ladies,” said the clerk who came to wait upon them only when he saw that they had made their selections, “we have quite a call for books on that topic. It is becoming a fad, and quite wonderful, too. I have thought some of buying a radio set myself.”

“We’re going to build one,” declared Amy with her usual prompt assurance.

“Are you? You two girls? Well, I don’t know why you shouldn’t. Lots of boys are doing so.”

“And anything a boy can do a girl ought to do a little better,” Amy added.

The clerk laughed as he wrapped up the several books Jessie had charged to her father’s account. “You let me know how you get on building it, will you?” he said. “Maybe I can get some ideas from your experience.”

“We’ll show ’em!” declared Amy, all in a glow of excitement. “And why do you suppose, Jess, folks always have to suggest that girls can’t do what boys can? Isn’t it ridiculous!”

“Very,” agreed Jessie. “Although, just as I pointed out a while ago, it would have been handy if Darry or Burd had been with us when we saw that poor girl kidnaped.”

“Of course! But, then, those boys are college men.” She giggled. “And I wager Burd is a sea-sick college man just now.”

“Oh! Have they gone out in the *Marigold*?” cried Jessie.

“They left New Haven the minute they could get away and joined the yacht at Groton, over across from New London, where it has been tied up all winter. Father insisted that Darry shouldn’t touch the yacht, when Uncle Will died and left it to him last fall, until the college year was ended. We got a marconigram last night that they had passed Block Island going out. And *now*— well, Burd never was at sea before, you know,” and Amy laughed again.

“It has been rather windy. I suppose it must be rough out in the ocean. Oh, Amy!” Jess suddenly exclaimed, “if I get my radio rigged why can’t we communicate with the *Marigold* when it is at sea?”

“I don’t know just why you can’t. But I guess the wireless rigging on the yacht isn’t like this radio thing you are going to set up. They use some sort of telegraph alphabet.”

“I know,” declared Jessie with conviction. “I’ll tell Darry to put in a regular sending set – like the one I hope to have, if father will let me. And we can have our two sets tuned so that we can hear each other speak.”

“My goodness! You don’t mean it is as easy as all that?” cried Amy.

“Didn’t you read that magazine article?” demanded her chum. “And didn’t the man say that, pretty soon, we could carry receiving and sending sets in our pockets – maybe – and stop right on the street and send or receive any news we wanted to?”

“No, I sha’n’t,” declared Amy. “Pockets spoil the set of even a sports skirt. Where you going now?”

“In here. Mr. Brill sells electrical supplies as well as hardware. Oh! Amy Drew! There is a radio set in his window! I declare, New Melford is advancing in strides!”

“Sure! In seven league boots,” murmured Amy, following her friend into the store.

Jessie had noted down the things she thought it would be safe to order before speaking to her father about the radio matter. Mrs. Norwood had cheerfully given her consent. Amy had once said that if Jessie went to her mother and asked if she could have a pet plesiosaurus, Mrs. Norwood would say:

“Of course, you may, dear. But don’t bring it into the house when its feet are wet.”

For the antenna and lead-in and ground wires, Jessie purchased three hundred feet of copper wire, number fourteen. The lightning switch Mr. Brill had among his electric fixtures – merely a porcelain base, thirty ampere, single pole double throw battery switch. She also obtained the necessary porcelain insulators and tubes.

She knew there would be plenty of rope in the Norwood barn or the garage for their need in erecting the aërials. But she bought a small pulley as well as the ground connections which Mr. Brill had in stock. He was anxious to sell her a complete set like that he was exhibiting in the show window; but Jessie would not go any farther than to order the things enumerated and ask to have them sent over the next morning.

The girls hurried home when they had done this, for it was verging on dinner time and they did not want to miss going with Nell Stanley and the Brandons to Parkville for the radio entertainment. Mr. Norwood was at home, and Jessie flew at him a good deal like an eager Newfoundland puppy.

“It is the most wonderful thing!” she declared, as she had introduced the subject to her chum.

She kept up the radio talk all through dinner. She was so interested that for the time being she forgot all about the girl that had been carried away in the automobile. Mr. Norwood had not been much interested in the new science; but he promised to talk the matter over with Mommy after their daughter had gone to the radio concert.

“Anyhow,” said Jessie, “I’ve bought the books telling how to rig it. And we’re going to do it all ourselves – Amy and I. And Mr. Brill is going to send up some wire and things. Of course, if you won’t let me have it, I’ll just have to pay for the hardware out of my allowance.”

“Very well,” her father said with gravity. “Maybe Chapman can find some use for the hardware if we don’t decide to build a radio station.”

As they seldom forbade their daughter anything that was not positively harmful, however, there was not much danger that Jessie’s allowance would be depleted by paying a share of the monthly hardware bill. Anyhow, Jessie as well as Amy, went off very gayly in the Brandon car with the minister’s daughter. Mr. Brandon drove his own car, and the girls sat in the tonneau with Mrs. Brandon, who did not seem by any means a very old lady, even if she was a grandmother.

“But grandmothers nowadays aren’t crippled up with rheumatism and otherwise decrepit,” declared Amy, the gay. “You know, I think it is rather nice to be a grandmother these days. I am going to matriculate for the position just as soon as I can.”

They rolled out of town, and just as they turned off the boulevard to take another road to Parkville, a big car passed the Brandon automobile coming into town. It was being driven very rapidly, but very skillfully, and the car was empty save for the driver.

“What beautiful cars those French cars are,” Mrs. Brandon said.

“Did you see her, Jess?” cried Amy, excitedly. “Look at her go!”

“Do you speak of the car or the lady?” laughed Nell Stanley.

“She is no lady, I’d have you know,” Amy rejoined scornfully. “Didn’t you know her when she passed, Jess?”

“I thought it was the car,” her chum admitted. “Are you sure that was the woman who ran off with the girl?”

“One of them,” declared Amy, with confidence. “And how she can drive!”

Naturally Mrs. Brandon and Nell wished to know the particulars of the chums’ adventure. But none of them knew who the strange woman who drove the French car was.

“She is not at all nice, at any rate,” Jessie said emphatically. “I really wish there was some way of finding out about that girl they carried off, and what became of her.”

CHAPTER IV

STRINGING THE AERIALS

Parkville was reached within a short time. It was still early evening. The girls from Roselawn and their host and hostess found a number of neighbors already gathered in the drawing-room, to listen to the entertainments broadcasted from several radio stations.

They were too late for the bedtime story; but from the cabinet-grand, like an expensive talking machine, the slurring notes of a jazz orchestra greeted their ears as plainly as though it were coming from a neighboring room instead of a broadcasting station many miles away. Amy confessed that it made her feet itch. She loved to dance.

There was singing to follow, a really good quartette. Then a humorist told some of his own funny stories and an elocutionist recited a bit from Shakespeare effectively. The band played a popular air and the amused audience began singing the song. It was fine!

"I'm just as excited as I can be," whispered Jessie to Nell and Amy. "Isn't it better than our talking machine? Why! it is almost like hearing the real people right in the room. And an amplifier of this kind is not scratchy one bit."

"There is no static to-night," said Mr. Brandon, who overheard the enthusiastic girl. "But it is not always so clear."

Jessie and Amy were too excited over this new amusement to heed anything that suggested "a fly in the ointment." When they drove home they were so full of radio that they chattered like magpies.

"I would put up the aerials and get a set myself," Nell declared, "only we don't really need any more talking machines of any kind at our house. Dear me! I sometimes wonder how the Reverend can write his sermons, there is so much noise and talk all the time. I have tacked felt all around his study door to try to make it sound-proof. But when Bob comes in he bangs the outer door until you are reminded of the Black Tom explosion. And Fred never comes downstairs save on his stomach – and on the banisters – and lands on the doormat like a load of brick out of a dumpcart. Then Sally squeals so!" She sighed.

"Nell Stanley," Amy said, "certainly has her own troubles."

"I do not see how the doctor stands it," commented Mrs. Brandon sympathetically.

"The Reverend is the greatest man in the world," declared Nell, with conviction. "He is wonderful. He takes the most annoying things so composedly. Why, you remember when he went to Bridgeton a month ago to speak at the local Sunday School Union? Something awfully funny happened. It would have floored any man but the Reverend."

"What happened?" asked Amy. "I bet it was a joke. Your father, Nell, always tells the most delightful stories."

"This isn't a story. It is so," chuckled Nell. "But I suppose that was why they asked him to amuse and entertain the little folks at one session of the Union. Father talked for fifteen minutes, all about Jacob's ladder, and those old stories. And not a kid of 'em went to sleep."

"He said he was proud to see them so wide awake, and when he was closing he thought he would find out if they really had been attentive. So he said:

"And now, is there any little boy or any little girl who would like to ask me a question?"

"And one boy called out: 'Say, Mister, if the angels had wings why did they walk up and down Jacob's ladder?'"

"Mercy!" ejaculated Mrs. Brandon. "What could he say?"

"That is it. You can't catch the Reverend," laughed Nell, proudly. "And nothing ever confuses him or puts him out. He just said:

“Oh, ah, yes, I see. And now, is there any little boy or any little girl who would like to answer that question?” And he bowed and slipped out.”

The laughter over this incident brought them into Roselawn, where Jessie and Amy got out, after thanking the kindly Brandons for the evening’s pleasure. Nell lived a little further along, and went on with Mr. and Mrs. Brandon.

“If I can find the time,” called Nell Stanley, as the car started again, “I am coming over to see how you rig your aerials, Jessie.”

“If I am allowed to,” commented Jessie, with a sudden fear that perhaps her father would find some objection to the new amusement.

But this small fear was immediately dissipated when she ran in after bidding Amy good-night. She found her father and mother both in the library. The package of radio books had been opened, and Mr. and Mrs. Norwood was each reading interestedly one of the pamphlets Jessie had chosen at the bookshop.

The three spent an hour discussing the new “plaything,” as Mr. Norwood insisted upon calling it. But he agreed to everything his daughter wanted to do, and even promised to buy Jessie a better receiving set than Brill, the hardware man, was carrying.

“As far as I can see, however, from what I read here,” said Mr. Norwood, “a better set will make no difference in your plans for stringing the aerials. You and Amy can go right ahead.”

“Oh, but, Robert,” said Mrs. Norwood, “do you think the two girls can do that work?”

“Why not? Of course Jessie and Amy can. If they need any help they can ask one of the men – the chauffeur or the gardener, or somebody.”

“We are going to do it all ourselves!” cried Jessie, eagerly. “This is going to be our very owniest own radio. You’ll see. We’ll put the set upstairs in my room.”

“Wouldn’t you rather have it downstairs – in the drawing-room, for instance?” asked her mother.

“I know you, Momsy. You’ll be showing it off to all your friends. And pretty soon it will be the family radio instead of mine.”

Mr. Norwood laughed. “I read here that the ordinary aerials will do very well for a small instrument or a large. It is suggested, too, that patents are pending that may make outside aerials unnecessary, anyway. Don’t you mind, Momsy. If we find we want a nice, big set for our drawing-room, we’ll have it in spite of Jessie. And we’ll use her aerials, too.”

The next day Brill sent up the things Jessie had purchased, but the girls could not begin the actual stringing of the copper wires until the morning following. Ample study of the directions for the work printed in the books Jessie had selected made the chums confident that they knew just what to do.

The windows of Jessie’s room on the second floor of the Norwood house were not much more than seventy-five feet from the corner of an ornamental tower that housed the private electric plant belonging to the place. It was a tank tower, and water and light had been furnished to the entire premises from this tower before the city plants had extended their service out Bonwit Boulevard and through Roselawn.

Jessie’s room had been the nursery when Jessie was little. It was now a lovely, comfortable apartment, decorated in pearl gray and pink, with willow furniture and cushions covered with lovely cretonne, an open fireplace in which real logs could be burned in the winter, and pictures of the girl’s own selection.

Her books were here. And all her personal possessions, including tennis rackets, riding whip and spurs, canoe paddle, and even a bag of golf sticks, were arranged in “Jessie’s room.” Out of it opened her bedroom and bath. It was a big room, too, and if the radio was successful they could entertain twenty guests here if they wanted to.

“But, of course, father is getting a set with phones, not with an amplifier like that one out at Parkville,” Jessie explained to her chum. “If we want to use a horn afterward, we may. Now, Amy, do you understand what there is to do?”

“Sure. We’ve got to get out our farmerette costumes. You know, those we used in the school gardens two years ago.”

“Oh, fine! I never would have thought of that,” crowed Jessie.

“Leave it to your Aunt Amy. She’s the wise old bird,” declared Amy. “I always did like those overalls. If I climb a ladder I don’t want any skirt to bother me. If the ladder begins to slip I want a chance to slide down like a man. Do the ‘Fireman, save my cheeld’ act.”

“You are as lucid as usual,” confessed her chum. Then she went on to explain: “I have found rope enough in the barn for our purpose – new rope. We will attach the end of the aerial wires with the rope to the roof of the old tower. It will enable us to make the far end of the aerials higher than my window – you see?”

“Necessary point; I observe. Go ahead, Miss Seymour.”

“Please don’t call me ‘Miss Seymour,’” objected Jessie, frowning. “For the poor thing has a wart on her nose.”

“No use at all there. Not even as a collar-button,” declared Amy. “All right; you are not Miss Seymour. And, come to think of it, I wonder if it was Miss Seymour I was thinking of last night when I thought that woman driving the kidnappers’ car looked like somebody I knew? Do you think—?”

“Oh! That horrid woman! I don’t dislike Miss Seymour, you know, Amy, even if she does teach English. I think she is almost handsome beside that motor-car driver. Yes, I do.”

“Wart and all?” murmured Amy.

But they were both too deeply interested in the radio to linger long on other matters. They laid out the work for the next morning, but did nothing practical toward erecting the wires and attendant parts that day. Amy came over immediately after breakfast, dressed in her farmerette costume, which was, in truth, a very practical suit in which to work.

The girls even refused the help of the gardener. He said they would be unable to raise the heavy ladder to the tower window; and that was a fact.

“All right,” said the practical Jessie, “then we won’t use the ladder.”

“My! I am not tall enough to reach the things up to you from the ground, Jess,” drawled Amy.

“Silly!” laughed her friend. “I am going up there to the top window in the tower. I can stand on the window sill and drive in the hook, and hang the aerial from there. See! We’ve got it all fixed on the ground here. I’ll haul it up with another rope. You stay down here and tie it on. You’ll see.”

“Well, don’t fall,” advised Amy. “The ground is hard.”

It had been no easy matter for the two girls to construct their aerial. The wire persisted in getting twisted and they had all they could do to keep it from kinking. Then, too, they wanted to fasten the porcelain insulators just right and had to consult one of the books several times. Then there came more trouble over the lead-in wire, which should have been soldered to the aerial but was only twisted tight instead.

The girls worked all the forenoon. When one end of the aerial was attached properly to the tower, Amy ran in and upstairs to her chum’s room and dropped a length of rope from one of the windows. Jessie came down from her perch and attached the house-end of the aerial to the rope. When Amy had the latter hauled up and fastened to a hook driven into the outside frame of Jessie’s window, the antenna was complete.

At that (and it sounds easy, but isn’t) they got it twisted and had to lower the house-end of the aerial again. While they were thus engaged, a taxi-cab stopped out in front. Amy, leaning from her chum’s window, almost fell out in her sudden excitement.

“Oh, Jess! They’ve come!” she shouted.

“What do you mean?” demanded Jessie. “We were not expecting anybody, were we?”

“You weren’t, but I was. I forgot to tell you,” cried Amy. “They just went around Long Island and came up the East River and through Hell Gate and got a mooring at the Yacht Club, off City Island.”

“Who are you talking about?” gasped her chum, wonderingly.

“Darry—”

“Darry!” ejaculated Jessie with mixed emotions. She glanced down at her overalls. She was old enough to want to look her best when Darrington Drew was on the scene. “Darry!” she murmured again.

“Yes. And Burd Alling. They telephoned early this morning. But I forgot. Here they come, Jess!”

Jessie Norwood turned rather slowly to look. She felt a strong desire to run into the house and make a quick change of costume.

CHAPTER V

THE FRECKLE-FACED GIRL

Of the two young fellows hurrying in from the boulevard one was tall and slim and dark; the other was stocky – almost plump, in fact – and sandy of complexion, with sharp, twinkling pond-blue eyes. Burdwell Alling's eyes were truly the only handsome feature he possessed. But he had a wonderfully sweet disposition.

Darry Drew was one of those quiet, gentlemanly fellows, who seem rather too sober for their years. Yet he possessed humor enough, and there certainly was no primness about him. It was he who hailed Jessie on the ground and Amy leaning out of the window above:

"I say, fellows! Have you seen a couple of young ladies around here who have just finished their junior year at the New Melford High with flying colors? We expected to find them sitting high and dry on the front porch, ready to receive company."

"Sure we did," added Burd Alling. "They have taken the highest degree in Prunes and Prisms and have been commended by their instructors for excellent deportment. And among all the calicos, they are supposed to take the bun as prudes."

Amy actually almost fell out of the window again, and stuck out her tongue like an impudent urchin. "A pair of smarties," she scoffed. "Come home and fret our ears with your college slang. How dare you!"

"I declare! Is that Miss Amy Drew?" demanded Burd, sticking a half dollar in his eye like a monocle and apparently observing Amy for the first time.

"It is not," said Amy sharply. "Brush by! I don't speak to strange young men."

But Darry had come to Jessie and shaken hands. If she flushed self-consciously, it only improved her looks.

"Awfully glad to see you, Jess," the tall young fellow said.

"It's nice to have you home again, Darry," she returned.

Amy ran down again then, in her usual harum-scarum fashion, and the conversation became general. How had the girls finished their high-school year? And how had the boys managed to stay a whole year at Yale without being asked to leave for the good of the undergraduate body?

Was the *Marigold* a real yacht, or just a row-boat with a kicker behind? And what were the girls doing in their present fetching costumes?

"The wires!" cried Burd. "Is it a trapeze? Are we to have a summer circus in Roselawn?"

"We shall have if you remain around here," was Amy's saucy reply. "But yon is no trapeze, I'd have you know."

"A slack wire? Who walks it – you or Jess?"

"Aw, Burd!" ejaculated Darry. "It's radio. Don't you recognize an aerial when you see it?"

"You have a fine ground connection," scoffed Burd.

"Don't you worry about us," Jessie took heart to say. "We know just what to do. Go upstairs again, Amy, and haul up this end of the contraption. I've got it untwisted."

A little later, when the aerial was secure and Jessie went practically to work affixing the ground connection, Darrington Drew said:

"Why, I believe you girls do know what you are about."

"Don't you suppose we girls know anything at all, Darry?" demanded his sister from overhead. "You boys have very little on us."

"Don't even want us to help you?" handsome Darry asked, grinning up at her.

"Not unless you approach the matter with the proper spirit," Jessie put in. "No lofty, high-and-mighty way goes with us girls. We can be met only on a plane of equality. But if you want to," she

added, smiling, “you can go up to my room where Amy is and pull that rope tauter. I admit that your masculine muscles have their uses.”

They were still having a lot of fun out of the securing of the aerials when suddenly Burd Alling discovered a figure planted on the gravel behind him. He swept off his cap in an elaborate bow, and cried:

“We have company! Introduce me, Amy – Jess. This young lady–”

“Smarty!” croaked a hoarse voice. “I don’t want to be introduced to nobody. I want to know if you’ve seen Bertha.”

“Big Bertha?” began Burd, who was as much determined on joking as Amy herself.

But Jessie Norwood, her attention drawn to the freckle-faced child who stood there so composedly, motioned Burd to halt. She approached and in her usual kindly manner asked what the strange child wanted.

It really was difficult to look soberly at the little thing. She might have been twelve years old, but she was so slight and undernourished looking that it was hard to believe she had reached that age. She had no more color than putty. And her sharp little face was so bespattered with freckles that one could scarcely see what its real expression was.

“Bertha who?” Jessie asked quietly. “What Bertha are you looking for?”

“Cousin Bertha. She’s an orphan like me,” said the freckled little girl. “I ain’t got anybody that belongs to me but Bertha; and Bertha ain’t got anybody that belongs to her but me.”

Burd and Amy were still inclined to be amused. But Darry Drew took his cue from Jessie, if he did not find a sympathetic cord touched in his own nature by the child’s speech and her forlorn appearance.

For she was forlorn. She wore no denim uniform, such as Amy had mentioned on a previous occasion as being the mark of the usual “orphan.” But it was quite plain that the freckle-faced girl had nobody to care much for her, or about her.

“I wish you would explain a little more, dear,” said Jessie, kindly. “Why did you come here to ask for your Cousin Bertha?”

“Cause I’m asking at every house along this street. I told Mrs. Foley I would, and she said I was a little fool,” and the child made the statement quite as a matter of course.

“Who is Mrs. Foley?”

“She’s the lady I help. When Mom died Mrs. Foley lived in the next tenement. She took me. She brought me out here to Dogtown when she moved.”

“Why,” breathed Amy, with a shudder, “she’s one of those awful Dogtown children.”

“Put a stopper on that, Amy!” exclaimed Darry, promptly.

But the freckle-faced girl heard her. She glared at the older girl – the girl so much better situated than herself. Her pale eyes snapped.

“You don’t haf to touch me,” she said sharply. “I won’t poison you.”

“Oh, Amy!” murmured her chum.

But Amy Drew was not at all bad at heart, or intentionally unkind. She flamed redly and the tears sprang to her eyes.

“Oh! I didn’t mean – Forgive me, little girl! What is your name? I’ll help you find your cousin.”

“My name’s Henrietta. They call me Hen. You needn’t mind gushin’ over me. I know how you feel. I’d feel just the same if I wore your clo’es and you wore mine.”

“By ginger!” exclaimed Burd Alling, under his breath. “There is philosophy for you.”

But Jessie felt hurt that Amy should have spoken so thoughtlessly about the strange child. She took Henrietta’s grimy hand and led the freckled girl to the side steps where they could sit down.

“Now tell me about Bertha and why you are looking for her along Bonwit Boulevard,” said Jessie.

“Do you wear these pants all the time?” asked Henrietta, suddenly, smoothing Jessie’s overalls. “I believe I’d like to wear ’em, too. They are something like little Billy Foley’s rompers.”

“I don’t wear them all the time,” said Jessie, patiently. “But about Bertha?”

“She’s my cousin. She lived with us before Mom died. She went away to work. Something happened there where she worked. I guess I don’t know what it was. But Bertha wrote to me – I can read written letters,” added the child proudly. “Bertha said she was coming out to see me this week. And she didn’t come.”

“But why should you think–”

“Lemme tell you,” said Henrietta eagerly. “That woman that hired Bertha came to Foleys day before yesterday trying to find Bertha. She said Bertha’d run away from her. But Bertha had a right to run away. Didn’t she?”

“I don’t know. I suppose so. Unless the woman had adopted her, or something,” confessed Jessie, rather puzzled.

“Bertha wasn’t no more adopted than I am. Mrs. Foley ain’t adopted me. I wouldn’t want to be a Foley. And if you are adopted you have to take the name of the folks you live with. So Bertha wasn’t adopted, and she had a right to run away. But she didn’t get to Dogtown.”

“But you think she might have come this way?”

“Yep. She’s never been to see me since we moved to Dogtown. So she maybe lost her way. Or she saw that woman and was scared. I’m looking to see if anybody seen her,” said the child, getting up briskly. “I guess you folks ain’t, has you?”

“I am afraid not,” said Jessie thoughtfully. “But we will be on the lookout for her, honey. You can come back again and ask me any time you like.”

The freckle-faced child looked her over curiously. “What do you say that for?” she demanded. “You don’t like me. I ain’t pretty. And you’re pretty – and that other girl,” (she said this rather grudgingly) “even if you do wear overalls.”

“Why! I want to help you,” said Jessie, somewhat startled by the strange girl’s downright way of speaking.

“You got a job for me up here?” asked Henrietta promptly. “I guess I’d rather work for you than for the Foleys.”

“Don’t the Foleys treat you kindly?” Amy ventured, really feeling an interest in the strange child.

“Guess she treats me as kind as a lady can when she’s got six kids and a man that drinks,” Henrietta said with weariness. “But I’d like to wear better clo’es. I wouldn’t mind even wearing them overall things while I worked if I had better to wear other times.”

She looked down at her faded gingham, the patched stockings, the broken shoes. She wore no hat. Really, she was a miserable-looking little thing, and the four more fortunate young people all considered this fact silently as Henrietta moved slowly away and went down the path to the street.

“Come and see me again, Henrietta!” Jessie called after her.

The freckled child nodded. But she did not look around. Darry said rather soberly:

“Too bad about the kid. We ought to do something for her.”

“To begin with, a good, soapy bath,” said his sister, vigorously, but not unkindly.

“She’s the limit,” chuckled Burd. “Hen is some bird, I’ll say!”

“I wonder–” began Jessie, but Amy broke in with:

“To think of her hunting up and down the boulevard for her cousin. And she didn’t even tell us what Bertha looked like or how old she is, or anything. My!”

“I wonder if we ought not to have asked her for more particulars,” murmured Jessie. “It is strange we should hear of another girl that had run away–”

But the others paid no attention at the moment to what Jessie was saying. It was plain that Amy did not at all comprehend what her chum considered. The lively one had forgotten altogether about the unknown girl she and Jessie had seen borne away in the big French car.

CHAPTER VI

SOMETHING COMING

That afternoon Mr. Norwood brought home the radio receiving set in the automobile. The two girls, with a very little help, but a plethora of suggestion from Darry and Burd, proceeded to establish the set on a table in Jessie's room, and attach the lead-in wire and the ground wire.

Jessie had bought a galena crystal mounted, as that was more satisfactory, the book said. After all the parts of the radio set had been assembled and the connections made, the first essential operation, if they were to make use of the invention at once, was to adjust the tiny piece of wire – the “cat's whisker” – which lightly rests on the crystal-detector, to a sensitive point.

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