

Marlowe Amy Bell

Wyn's Camping Days: or, The Outing of the Go-Ahead Club



Amy Marlowe

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CHAPTER I

THE GO-AHEAD CLUB

"Oh, girls! such news!" cried Wynifred Mallory, banging open the door of Canoe Lodge, and bringing into the living room a big breath of the cool May air, which drew out of the open fireplace a sudden balloon of smoke, setting the other members of the Go-Ahead Club there assembled coughing.

Grace Hedges, who was acting as fireman that week, turned an exasperated face, with a bar of smut across it, exclaiming:

"If another soul comes in that door and creates a back-draught until this fire gets to burning properly, I certainly shall have hysterics! I never did see such a mean old thing to burn."

"Never mind, Gracie. We're all here now—all six of us. There are no more Go-Aheads to come," observed Bessie Lavine, yawning over her book in the only sunny corner of the room.

"There! it's burning—finally," exclaimed Grace, with blended disgust and thankfulness. "I never was cut out for a fireman, girls."

"Poor Gracie," purred Wyn, who had approached the blaze that was now beginning to curl through the hickory sticks piled more or less scientifically against the backlog. "Don't you know it needed just that back-draught to break the deadlock in the chimney and start your fire crackling this way?"

"Bah! it was just hateful," grumbled Grace. "I hate fire making. And it does seem as though my week for playing fireman comes around twice as often as it should." Wyn had moved rather too near to the darting flames, and Grace suddenly pulled the captain of the club aside. "*Don't* stand so near, Silly!" she cried.

"Fireman! save my che-ild!" wailed "Frank" Cameron, coming forward and winding her long arms around Wynifred. "What's the news, Wyn, dear? Nobody had the politeness to ask you. Wherefore all the excitement?"

"There must be a strike at the blacksmith shop," said Percy Havel, a curly-headed blonde girl.

"No!" cried Frank, with a droll twist of her rather homely features. "I'll wager they've laid off one of the hands of the town clock. Business is dreadfully dull. I heard my father say so."

She was a tall, lanky girl, was Frances Cameron, with a great mass of blue-black hair and flashing black eyes. She was thin, strong, and lacking in those soft curves of budding womanhood which girls of her age usually display. "Straight up and down, my dears," she often said. "Built upon the most approved clothespin plan, with every bone perfectly—not to say generously—developed."

"Well," said Wyn, laughing, "if you girls will give me a chance I will divulge my news."

"Be still!" commanded Frank. "The oracle speaks."

"Oh, hurry up, Wyn!" exclaimed Percy, coming nearer the group before the now roaring fire. "I've been dying to tell them."

"Well, girls," said Wyn, smiling, so that her brown eyes fairly danced. "Mrs. Havel—Percy's aunt—says she will go."

"Fine!" exclaimed Frankie.

"You don't mean it, Wyn?" gasped Mina Everett. "Then we really *can* go camping?"

"And to Lake Honotonka?" put in Bessie.

"That's what we aimed to do; wasn't it?" demanded Wyn, laughing. "And when the Go-Ahead Club starts to do a thing, it usually arrives; doesn't it?"

"At least, the captain arrives for them," said Frank, giving Wyn's arm a little squeeze. "We wouldn't get far in our 'go-ahead' plans if it wasn't for you, Wynnle."

"Such flattery!" protested the captain.

"You didn't have an easy time convincing my mother—I know that," said Mina, shaking *her* head. "You know, she's so afraid of water."

"And my mother is afraid of high winds," confessed Bessie. "Wyn had to coax to bring her around."

"And of course, Gracie's mother is afraid of fire," chuckled Frank; "and there you have the three elements. You can plainly see that Gracie knows very little about fire. She never built one in her life until we formed our camping club."

"Oh, well," observed Grace, trying to rub the smut off her face with a handkerchief and the aid of a pocket-mirror, "this is about the end of the fire season, thank goodness! If we go into camp after school closes, on Lake Honotonka, there won't be any fires to build."

"Oh, *won't* there?" cried Bessie. "You just wait. Instead of taking turns at being fireman for the week, as we do through the winter, we'll draw lots to see who shall build *all* the fires. And you know very well, Gracie, that you always *are* unlucky."

"Sure she is," agreed Frank. "She always draws the very boobiest of all booby prizes out of the grab-bag."

"Oh, dear me!" wailed Grace, who was big, and handsome, and not a little lazy, "I do so hate to work, too. If there had been another set of girls I liked at Denton Academy, I'd never have joined the Go-Ahead Club."

"Right. Gracie is better fitted for a Fall-Behind Club," observed Wyn.

"But tell us, Wynnle," begged Mina. "Is it really all arranged? Has everybody agreed that we can go in our canoes to Lake Honotonka?"

"And stay all vacation if we like?" cried Percy.

"That is the understanding," Wyn assured them. "Percy's aunt is the very kindest lady who ever was —"

"Vote we buy her something nice," interposed Frank.

"That will come in due season," Wyn continued. "But Mrs. Havel went with me to all our people. She knows all about the place, of course —"

"So does my father," interposed Bessie.

"And he wasn't hard to convince," Wyn responded. "Of course, there are wild nooks along Honotonka's shores; but at the upper end is Braisely Park, where all those rich folks live; and there's the village of Meade's Forge at this end of the lake. We can get supplies, or a doctor, or send a telephone message, easily enough. And what more does one want—camping out?"

"We'll have just a lovely time!" sighed Bessie. "I can hardly wait for school to close."

"A month and a half yet," said Frank Cameron. "And every day will seem longer than the one that preceded it. But then! when it does come —"

"Just think of living under canvas—and for weeks and weeks! It almost makes me feel spooky," declared Grace, beginning to grow enthusiastic.

These girls, all attending Denton Academy and living within the limits of that town, being the daughters of fairly well-to-do parents, had been able to enjoy many advantages as well as pleasures that poorer girls could not have; but none of them had chanced to experience the joys of a vacation in the woods.

During the preceding autumn they had become immensely interested in canoeing. Denton was situated upon the beautiful, winding Wintinooski, and the six members of the Go-Ahead Club had

taken several Saturday cruises on the river. But never had they gone as far up the stream as Lake Honotonka.

That was a wide and beautiful sheet of water, thirty-five miles to the west of the town of Denton. Their boy friends had sometimes been allowed to go camping upon the shores of the lake; and their enthusiastic praise of the fun to be had under canvas had set Wynifred Mallory and her chums “just wild,” as Frank Cameron expressed it, to try it too.

Wyn was a girl of determination and physical as well as moral courage. If she made up her mind that a thing was right, and she wanted it, she usually got it.

When the girls first broached their desire to spend the summer at the big lake, and actually live under canvas, not one of their parents encouraged the idea. Because the “Busters,” a certain boys’ club of the girls’ friends, were going to the lake again for the long vacation, made no difference to the mothers and fathers—especially the mothers of Wyn and her chums of the Go-Ahead Club.

“It’s no use,” Bessie Lavine had reported, at their first meeting after the idea was born in Canoe Lodge, as the girls called their novel boathouse overhanging the bank of a quiet pool of the Wintinooski. “Even father won’t hear of it. Six girls going alone into the wilds – ”

“But the Busters and Professor Skillings will be near our camp,” Frank had cried. “That’s what I told mother. But she couldn’t see it.”

Wyn had listened at that meeting to the opinions of all the other girls—and to their hopeless and disappointed complaints as well—and then she had taken the whole burden on her own shoulders.

“Don’t you say another word at home about it, girls—any of you,” she said. “Leave it to me. Our idea of living for the summer in the open is a good one. We’ll come back to school in the fall with ginger and health enough to keep us going like dynamos during the next school year.”

“But you can’t make my mother see that,” wailed Percy. “She only sees the snakes, and mosquitoes, and tramps, and big winds, and drowning, and I don’t know but she visualizes earthquake shocks and volcanoes!”

“Give me a chance,” said Wyn.

“Voted!” Frankie declared. “When Wyn sets out to do a thing we might as well give her her head. She’s like Davy Crockett; and I hope all our folks will come down without being shot, like the historic ‘coon.”

And this present declaration of their captain, which had so aroused the Go-Ahead Club, was the result of Wyn Mallory’s exertions.

She had first obtained the interest and cooperation of Percy’s Aunt Evelyn, who was a widowed lady fond of outdoor life herself. Mrs. Havel was to act as chaperone. With this addition to their forces, the girls stood a much better chance to win over their parents to their plan.

And finally Wyn had gained the permission of the most obdurate parent. The cruise of the Go-Ahead Club in their canoes to Lake Honotonka, and their camping for the summer at some available spot along the lake shore, was decided upon.

“And are the Busters going?” asked Frank. “That’s the next important matter.”

“Oh, we can get along without those boys, I guess,” scoffed Bessie.

“Yes, I know. We don’t need ‘em. And they are a great nuisance sometimes,” admitted Frank, laughing. “But just the same, we’ll have lots more fun with them around—especially Dave Shepard—eh, Wynn?”

“I don’t see that you need *me* to witness the truth of your statement, Frank,” returned Wyn, flushing very prettily, for the girls sometimes teased her about Dave, who was her next-door neighbor. “Of course we want the boys, even if Bess is a man-hater.”

“I guess they’ll go,” Frank said. “They liked it so much last year. And the professor is interested in the geological specimens to be found up that way.”

“Goodness!” exclaimed Mina. “Is Professor Skillings going with them again? He is so odd.”

“He’s very absent-minded,” said Bessie.

Frank began to laugh again. "Say!" she began, "did you hear about what happened to him last week? Father met him coming down Lane Street—you know, it's narrow and the sidewalk in places is scarcely wide enough for two people to pass comfortably.

"There was poor Professor Skillings hobbling along with one foot continually in the gutter, his eyes fixed on a book he was reading as he walked. Father said to him:

"Good morning, Professor! How are you feeling to-day?"

"Why—why—why!" exclaimed the professor—you know his funny way of speaking. "Why—why—why—I was very well when I started out, I thought. But I don't know what's come over me. Do you know, I've developed a pronounced limp since leaving the house!"

"Well, the boys like him," Wyn said, when the girls' laughter had subsided.

"I thought I saw Dave Shepard and that 'Tubby' Blaisdell around here when I hurried down from school to light the fire," remarked Grace.

At that moment a strange, scraping sound was heard right above the girls' heads. Bess and Mina jumped up.

"What's that?" cried Grace.

"It's something on the roof," declared Wyn.

Now, Canoe Lodge was built on a high bank over the river. One stepped from the level sward into the living room. The roof on one side was a short, sharp pitch; but over the river it ran out in a long, easy slope to shelter the canoe landing.

Suddenly there was a crash, and the very house shook. There was a wheezy shout of alarm, the sound of another voice in wild laughter, and some heavy body slid down the long side of the roof with the noise of an avalanche.

"The Busters!" shrieked Percy, and ran to a window overlooking the river.

CHAPTER II

THE BUSTERS

The girls could overlook the lower slope of the long roof through the bay window at the end of the living room. They crowded to it after Percy Havel, and beheld a most amazing as well as ridiculous sight.

A very fat youth, in a blue and white striped sweater and with a closely-cropped yellow head, was face down upon a length of plank, which plank was sliding like a bobsled down the incline of green-stained shingles.

"It's Tubby!" gasped Frank Cameron.

"Oh! oh! oh!" squealed Mina. "Is he doing that for *fun*?"

Before any further comment could be made, the boy on the plank shot out over the edge of the roof and dived, with a mighty splash, into the deep water of the pool, adjoining which Canoe Lodge was built.

"He'll be drowned!" cried Grace, wringing her plump hands.

"It'll serve him right if he is!" exclaimed Bessie. "What business had he on our roof, I want to know?"

"Poor Tubby!" cried Wyn, choked with laughter.

"Isn't he the most ridiculous creature that ever was?" rejoined Frank. "See there! he's come up to blow like a frog."

"It's a whale that comes up to blow," Wyn reminded her.

"Well! isn't Tubby Blaisdell a regular whale of a boy?" returned the black-eyed girl.

"There's Dave!" cried Mina.

"I knew the two wouldn't be far apart!" sniffed Bess Lavine.

"He's got a boat and is going to Tubby's rescue," cried Grace.

"But see Tubby flounder around!" Frankie observed. "Why! that boy couldn't sink if you filled his pockets with flatirons!"

"There! he *is* going under," ejaculated the more timorous Mina.

"Dave will get him, all right," declared Wyn, with confidence.

She and Dave Shepard had been good chums since they were both in rompers. Her girl friends might tease Wyn sometimes about Dave; but the girl had no brothers and Dave made up the loss to her in every way.

"Oh! he's going to spear him with that boathook!" gasped Mina again.

And really, it looked so. Tubby Blaisdell was splashing about in the pool before the canoe landing like a young grampus. Tubby was always getting into more or less serious predicaments, and he always "lost his head" and usually had to be aided by his friends.

In this case Dave Shepard prepared to literally spear him in the water. Dave—who was a tall, athletic boy, with a frank, pleasant face, if freckled, and close-cut brown curls in profusion—had driven the flat-bottomed skiff he had obtained from a neighboring landing, across the pool, and now, standing erect in the boat, with a single lunge impaled upon the boathook the tail of Tubby's coat.

His chum was going down, as Dave thrust the boathook; for the unfortunate victim of the accident had swallowed a quantity of water when he dived with the plank from the eaves of the roof of Canoe Lodge. There was no time to lose if Dave wished to rescue Tubby before serious injury resulted to the unfortunate fat youth.

It was something of a feat to bring Tubby Blaisdell alongside the skiff and haul him inboard without overturning the boat. But Dave accomplished it to the admiration of the girls—even to Bessie's satisfaction.

"Well, I'm glad he got Tubby out," said that damsel, nodding her head.

"Glad to know that you are so humane, Bess," laughed Frank.

The girls trooped out to learn at closer range if the Blaisdell youth was really injured or only exhausted.

He lay panting like a big fish in the bottom of the skiff. It was altogether too cold an evening for him to be exposed in his wet clothing. When the skiff's nose bumped into the shore, Dave Shepard leaped out with alacrity and secured the painter to a post.

"Get up out of there, Tubby!" he commanded. "You'll get your death of dampness. Come on!"

"Oh—oh—oh! I can't," chattered the fat youth. "I—I'm fr-roze to the ve-ry mar-row of m-m-my bones!"

"The chill has struck in awful deep, then, Tubby," cried Frank Cameron, from the river bank.

"Come on out of that!" commanded Dave. "I'm going to run you home so that you will not get cold."

"Me?" chattered Blaisdell, rising like a turtle out of its shell. "Run me home? Wh-wh-why, I c-c-couldn't do it. You know I couldn't r-r-run that far, Dave."

"He must go right in by our fire and get warm," declared Wyn, quickly. "Get your things, girls, and we'll all go home and leave Dave and Tubby to enjoy that nice fire Grace built."

"That wet boy all over our nice rug!" exclaimed Bessie. "I object."

"Don't be hateful, Bess," admonished Grace.

"But what was he doing on our roof?" demanded the girl who claimed that she did not like boys. At this Dave burst into a great laugh and was scarcely able to drag Tubby ashore.

"It's a wonder he didn't come right through on our heads," complained Frank. "He's so heavy."

"But he *would* do it," declared Dave, still laughing as he helped his fat friend up the bank to the door of Canoe Lodge. "It would have been a real good trick, too, if Tubby hadn't slipped."

"Always up to mischief!" sniffed Bessie Lavine. "That's why I dislike boys so."

"I don't see what he could do on our roof," said Wyn, wonderingly.

"And he had no business there!" cried Grace.

"Why," explained Dave, for Tubby could not defend himself. "We saw Grace making the fire, and we knew the wood was green. It made a big smudge coming out of the chimney, and Tubby thought he had a brilliant idea."

"I know!" exclaimed Frankie. "He had that plank to put over the top of our chimney. We'd have been smoked out, sure enough."

"That's it," chuckled Dave. "Tubby got up all right, and he got the plank up all right. But just as he tried to lift the plank to the top of the chimney his foot slipped, the board dropped, he fell on it as if he was coasting down hill, and—you saw the rest!"

"Oh—oh!" chattered Tubby. "Come on in and let me get—get to—to th-that f-f-fire. I'm *frozen*!"

"Here's the key, Dave," said Wyn, laughing (for the fat youth *did* look so funny), "and you can lock up when you go home and bring the key to my house. Don't you boys make a mess in here for us to clean up," she added.

"But they will. Boys always do," declared Bessie Lavine.

"Well, thank goodness, it won't be *my* turn to clean up after them, or make another fire," declared Grace.

"They will do no damage," returned Wyn, with assurance, as the girls trooped away from the boathouse toward the town.

"They have to keep their camp clean," declared Frank. "I know that. Professor Skillings may be forgetful; but he is very particular about *that*. Ferdinand Roberts told me so."

"I expect those horrid Busters *do* know a lot more than we do about camping."

"Indeed they do," sighed Grace. "How'll we ever put up a tent big enough to house seven?"

"The boys will help us," declared Wyn.

"I expect we'll have to let them," grumbled Bess. "Or else pay a man to do it for us."

"My goodness me!" laughed Frances Cameron. "It must be a dreadful thing to hate boys like Bess does! They're awfully bad sometimes, I know – "

"Look at what those two boys tried to do to us this very evening," exclaimed Bessie.

"Oh, Tubby's always up to some foolishness," said Percy, laughing.

"And that Dave Shepard is just as bad!" cried Bess Lavine, tossing her head.

"Wyn won't agree with that statement," chuckled Frank.

"And all six of the Busters are full of mischief," went on the complaining one. "I wish they were not going to the same place we are to camp."

"Why, Bess!" exclaimed Mina.

"I *do* wish that. They'll be around under foot all the time. And they'll play tricks, and be rough and rude, and I know they will spoil the summer for us."

"You go on!" came from Frank, with some scorn. "I guess I can hold up my end against the Busters."

"Just wait and see," prophesied Bessie, shaking her head. "I feel very sure that, the Busters and the Go-Ahead Club will not get along well together at Lake Honotonga."

"It takes two parties for an argument," said Wyn Mallory, quietly. "And in spite of their mischief I believe in the Busters."

"Wait and see if what I say isn't true!" snapped Bessie, and turned off into a side street toward her own home.

CHAPTER III

POLLY

Wyn Mallory was one of those girls whom people called “different.”

Not that there was a thing really odd about her. She was happy, healthy, more than a little athletic, of a sanguine temperament, and possessed a deal of tact for a girl of her age.

But there was a quality in her character that balanced her better than most girls are. That foundation of good sense on which only can be erected a lasting character, was Wyn's. She was just as girlish and “fly-away” at times, as Frances Cameron herself, or Percy Havel; but she always stopped short of hurting another person's feelings and she seemed to really enjoy doing things for others, which her mates sometimes acclaimed as “tiresome.”

And don't think there was a mite of self-consciousness about all this in Wyn Mallory's make-up, for there wasn't. She enjoyed being helpful and kind because that was her nature—not for the praise she might receive from her older friends.

Wyn was a natural leader. Such girls always are. Without asserting themselves, other girls will look up to them, and copy them, and follow them. Whereas a bad, or ill-natured, or haughty girl must have some means of bribing the weak-minded ones to gain a following at all.

The Mallory family was a small one. Wyn had a little sister; but there was a difference of twelve years between them. The family was a very affectionate one, and Papa Mallory, Mamma Mallory, and Wyn all worshipped at the shrine of little May.

So when at supper that Friday evening something was said about certain drygoods needed for the little one, Wyn offered at once to spend her Saturday forenoon shopping.

She had plenty to do that morning; Saturday morning is always a busy time for any school girl in the upper grades, and Wyn was well advanced at Denton Academy. But she hastened out by nine o'clock and went down town.

Denton was a pretty town, with good stores, a courthouse, well stocked library and several churches of various denominations. In the center was an ancient Parade Ground—a broad, well-shaped public park, with a huge flagstaff in the middle of the main field, and Civil War cannon flanking the entrances.

Denton had a history. On this open field the Minute Men had marched and counter-marched; and before Revolutionary days, even, the so-called “train-bands” had paraded here. Like Boston Common, Denton's Parade Ground was a plot devoted for all time to the people, and could be used for no other purpose but that of a public park.

The streets that bordered the three sides of the Parade Ground (for it was of flat-iron shape) were the best residential streets of the town; yet Market Street—the main business thoroughfare—was only a square away from one side of the park.

Wyn Mallory on this bright May morning walked briskly along the shaded side of the park and turned off at Archer Street to reach the main stem of the town, where the shops stood in rows and the electric cars to Maynury had the right of way in the middle of the street.

Her very first call was at Mr. Erad's drygoods and notion store. His shop was much smaller than some of the modern “department” stores that had of late appeared in Denton; but the old store held the conservative trade. Mr. Erad had been in trade, at this very corner, from the time he was a smooth-faced young man; and now his hair and beard were almost white.

He was a pleasant, cheerful—and usually charitable—gentleman, with rosy cheeks and gold-rimmed spectacles. He spent most of his time “on the floor,” greeting old customers, attracting new ones with his courtesy, and generally overseeing the salesmen.

He usually had a pleasant word and a hand-shake for Wyn when she entered his store; but this morning the old gentleman did not even notice her as she came through one of the turnstile doors.

He stood near, however, speaking with a girl of about Wyn's age—a girl who was a total stranger to the captain of the Go-Ahead Club. The stranger was rather poorly dressed. She wore shabby gloves, and a shabby hat, and shabby shoes. Besides, both her dark frock and the hat were “ages and ages” behind the fashion.

Her clothes were really so ugly that the girl herself did not have a chance to look her best. Wyn realized that after the second glance. And she saw that the strange girl was almost handsome.

She was as big as Grace Hedges; but she was dark. Her hair was beautifully crinkled where it lay flat against the sides of her head over her ears. At the back there was a great roll, and it was glossy and well cared-for. Even a girl who cannot afford to dress in the mode can make her hair beautiful by a little effort.

This girl had made that effort and, furthermore, she had made herself as neat as anyone need be.

In addition to her beautiful hair, the stranger's other attractions can be enumerated as a long, well formed nose, well defined eyebrows and long lashes, and deep gray eyes that looked almost black in the shade of her broad brow. Her skin was lovely, although she was very much bronzed by the sun. A rose-flush showed through this tan and aided her red, full lips to give color to her face. Her teeth were two splendid, perfect rows of dazzling white; her chin was beautifully molded. This fully developed countenance was lit by intelligence, as well, and, with her well rounded figure and gentle, deprecating manner, Wyn thought of her instantly as a big helpless child.

Mr. Erad was speaking very sternly to her, and that, alone, made Wyn desire to take her part. She could not bear to hear anybody scold a person so timid and humble. And at every decisive phrase Mr. Erad uttered, Wyn could see her wince.

“I cannot do it. I do not see why I should,” declared the storekeeper. “Indeed, there are many reasons why I should not. Yes—I know. I employed John Jarley at one time. But that was years ago. He would not stay with me. He was always trying something new. And he never stuck to a thing long enough for either he—or anybody else—to find out whether he was fitted for it or not.

“Hold on! I take that back. I guess there's *one* man in town,” said Mr. Erad, with almost a snarl, “who thinks John Jarley stuck long enough on one job.”

Wyn, frankly listening, but watching the girl and Mr. Erad covertly, saw the former's face flame hotly at the shot. But her murmured reply was too low for Wyn to hear.

“Ha! I know nothing was ever proved against him. But decent people know the other party, and know that he is square. John Jarley got out of town and stayed out of town. That was enough to show everybody that he felt guilty.”

“You are wrong, sir,” said the dark girl, her voice trembling, but audible now in her strong emotion. “You are wrong. It was my mother's ill health that took us into the woods. And the ill-natured gossip of the neighbors—just such things as you have now repeated—troubled my mother, too. So father took us away from it all.”

“If he was honest, he made a great mistake in running away at that time,” asserted Mr. Erad.

“No, he made no mistake,” returned the girl, her fine eyes flashing. “He did the right thing. He saved my mother agony, and made her last years beautiful. My father did no wrong in either case, sir.”

“Well, well, well!” snapped Mr. Erad. “I cannot discuss the matter with you. We should not agree, I am sure. And I can do nothing for you.”

“Wait, please! give me a chance! Let me work for you to pay for these things we need. I will work faithfully – ”

“I have no place for you.”

“Oh, sir – ”

“My goodness, girl! *No*, I tell you. Isn't that enough? Beside, you are not well dressed enough to wait upon my customers. And you could not earn enough here to pay your board, dress decently, and pay for any bill of goods that you—or your father—may want.”

The girl turned away. There was a bit of dingy veiling attached to the front of her old-fashioned hat, and Wyn saw her pull this down quickly over her face. The listener knew *why*, and she had to wink her own eyes hard to keep back the tears.

She deliberately turned her back upon old Mr. Erad, whom she was usually so glad to see, and went hastily down the aisle. From her distant station by the notion counter she saw the drooping figure of the strange girl leave the store.

Wyn Mallory was worried. She could not see a forlorn cat on the street, or a homeless dog shivering beside a garbage can, that she was not tempted to “do something for it.”

Dave Shepard often laughingly said that it was an adventure to go walking with Wyn Mallory. One never knew what she was going to see that needed “fixing.” And Dave might have added, that if Wyn had him for escort, she usually got these wrong things “fixed.”

She now hastened through her purchasing, not with any definite object in view, save that she wanted to get out of the store. Mr. Erad was not at all the nice, charitable man whom she had always supposed him to be. That is, it looked so now to the impulsive, warm-hearted girl.

Her mind was fixed upon the strange girl and her troubles. Wyn did not neglect the errand her mother had given her to do, although she hurried her shopping.

When she was out of the store, she drew a long breath. “I couldn't breathe in that place—not well,” she told herself. “I wonder where that poor girl has gone now?”

There was nobody to answer her, nor was the strange girl in sight. Wyn felt rather remorseful that she had not let her shopping wait and followed the strange girl out of the store immediately.

The stranger might have been in desperate straits. Wyn could not imagine anybody begging for goods, and for work, especially after the way Mr. Erad had spoken, unless in great trouble.

Wyn began to take herself seriously to task. The strange girl had disappeared and she had not even tried to help her, or comfort her.

“I might have gone out and offered some little help, or sympathy. How do I know what will become of her? And she may have no friends in town. At least, it is evident that she does not live here.”

There were several other errands to do. All the time, especially while she was on the street, she kept her eye open for the strange girl whose name she presumed must be “Jarley.”

But Wyn did not see her anywhere, and it seemed useless to wander down Market Street looking for her. So, when she had completed her purchases, she turned her face homeward.

She went up past Mr. Erad's store again and turned through Archer Street. As she crossed into the park she looked for a settee to rest on, for unconsciously she had walked more briskly than usual.

There, under a wide-limbed oak, was a green-painted seat, removed from any other settee; but there was a figure on it.

“There's room for two, I guess,” thought Wyn; and then she made a discovery that almost made her cry out aloud. Its occupant was the very girl for whom she was in search!

Wyn controlled her impulse to run forward, and approached the bench quite casually. Before she reached it, however, she realized that the dark girl was crying softly.

Natural delicacy would have restrained Wyn from approaching the girl so abruptly. Only, she was deeply interested, and already knowing the occasion for her tears, the captain of the Go-Ahead Club could not ignore the forlorn figure on the bench.

Without speaking, she dropped into the seat beside the strange girl, and put her hand on the other's shoulder.

“My dear!” she said, when the startled gray eyes—all a-flood with tears—were raised to her own. “My dear, tell me all about it—*do*! If I can't help you, I will be your friend, and it will make you feel lots better to tell it all to somebody who sympathizes.”

“Bu-but you ca-can’t sympathize with me!” gasped the other, looking into Wyn’s steady, brown eyes and finding friendliness and commiseration there. “You—you see, you never knew the lack of anything good; you’re not poor.”

“No, I am not poor,” admitted Wyn.

“And I don’t want charity!” cried the strange girl quickly.

“I am not going to offer it to you. But I’d dearly love to be your friend,” Wyn said. “You know—you’re so pretty!” she added, impulsively.

The girl flushed charmingly again. “I—I guess I’m not very pretty in my old duds, and with my nose and eyes red from crying.”

But she was really one of those few persons who are not made ugly by crying. She had neither red eyes nor a red nose.

“Do tell me what troubles you,” urged Wyn, patting her firm, calloused hand.

Those hands were no soft, useless members—no, indeed! Pretty as she was, the stranger had evidently been in the habit of performing arduous manual labor.

“Where do you live, my dear?” asked Wyn, again, as her first question was not answered.

“Up beyond Meade’s Forge,” said the strange girl.

“Oh, my! On Lake Honotonka?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Please don’t *ma’am* me!” cried the captain of the Go-Ahead Club. “My name is Wynifred Mallory. My friends all call me Wyn. Now, I want you to be my friend, so you must commence calling me Wyn right away.”

“But—but you don’t know me,” said the other girl, hesitatingly.

“I am going to; am I not?” demanded Wyn, with her frank smile. “Surely, now that I have confided in you, you will confide in me to the same extent? Or, don’t you like me?”

“Of course I like you!” exclaimed the still sobbing girl. “But—but I do not know that I have any right to allow you to be my friend.”

“Goodness me! why not?” exclaimed Wyn.

“Why—why, we have a bad name in this town, it seems,” said the other.

“Who have?” snapped Wyn, hating Mr. Erad harder than ever now.

“My father and I.”

“What have you done that makes you a pariah?” exclaimed Wyn, fairly laughing now. “Aren’t you foolish?”

“No. People say my father was not honest I am Polly Jarley,” said the girl, desperately.

“Polly Jolly?” cried Wyn. “Not much you are! You are anything but jolly. You are Polly Miserrimus.”

“I don’t know what that means, ma’am – ”

“Wyn!” exclaimed the other girl, quickly.

“M—Miss Wyn.”

“Not right. Just Wyn. Plain Wyn – ”

“Oh, I couldn’t call you plain,” cried the poorly dressed girl, with some spontaneity now. “For you are very pretty. But I don’t really know what Mis—Mis – ”

“‘Miserrimus’?”

“That is it.”

“It’s Latin, and it means miserable, all right,” laughed Wyn. “And you act more to fit the name of ‘Polly Miserrimus’ than that of ‘Polly Jolly.’”

“It’s Jarley, Miss Wyn.”

“But now tell me all about it, Polly,” urged Wyn, having by this means stopped the flow of Polly’s tears. “Surely it will help you just to free your mind. And don’t be foolish enough to think that I wouldn’t want to know you and be your friend if your poor father was the biggest criminal on earth.”

“He isn’t! He is unfortunate. He has been accused wrongfully, and everybody is against him,” exclaimed Polly, with some heat.

“All right. Then let’s hear about it,” urged Wyn, capturing both of the other girl’s hands in her own, and smiling into her tear-drenched gray eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE SILVER IMAGES

“Didn’t you ever hear of us Jarleys?” Polly first of all demanded.

“Only as being interested in the wax-work business,” replied Wyn, with twinkling eyes.

“I—I guess father never made wax-work,” said Polly, hesitatingly.

She was an innocent sort of girl, who evidently lacked many advantages of education and reading that Wyn and her friends had enjoyed as a matter of course.

“Well, I never heard the name before to-day—not *your* name, nor your father’s,” Wyn said.

“Well, we used to live here.”

“In Denton?”

“Yes, ma’am – ”

“Will you stop that?” cried Wyn. “I am Wyn Mallory, I tell you.”

“All right, Wyn. It’s a pretty name. I’ll be glad to use it,” returned Polly.

“Prove it by using it altogether,” commanded Wyn. “Now, what about your father?”

“I—I can’t tell you much about it—much of the particulars, I mean,” said the girl from Lake Honotonka, diffidently. “I don’t really know them. Father never speaks of it much. But even as a tiny girl mother explained to me that when folks said father had done wrong I must deny it. That it was not so. It was only circumstances that made him appear in the wrong. And—you know, Wyn—your mother wouldn’t lie to you!”

“Of course not!” cried Wyn, warmly. “Of course not!”

“Well, then, you’ll have to believe just what I tell you. Father was in some business deal with a man here in Denton, and something went wrong. The other man accused father of being dishonest. Father could not defend himself. Circumstances were dead against him. And it worried mother so that it made her sick.

“So we all left town. Father had very little money, and he built a shack up there in the woods near Honotonka. We’re just ‘squatters’ up there. But gradually father got a few boats, and built a float, and made enough in the summer from fishermen and campers to support us. Of course, mother being sick so many years before she died, kept us very poor. I only go to the district school winters. Then I have to walk four miles each way, for we own no horse. Summers I help father with the boats.”

“That’s where you got such palms! cried Wyn, touching her new friend’s calloused hands again.

“It’s rowing does it. But I don’t mind. I love the water, you see.”

“So do I. I’ve got a canoe. I’m captain of a girls’ canoe club.”

“That’s nice,” said Polly. “I suppose when you take up boating for just a sport it’s lots better than trying to make one’s living out of it.”

“Well, tell me more,” urged Wyn. “What are you in town for now? Why did I find you crying here on the bench?”

“A man hurt me by talking harshly about poor father,” said the girl from Lake Honotonka.

“Come on! tell me,” urged Wyn, giving her a little shake. Polly suddenly threw an arm about the town girl and hugged her tightly.

“I *do* love you, Wyn Mallory,” she sobbed. “I—I wish you were my sister. I get so lonely sometimes up there in the woods, for there’s only father and me now. And this past winter he was very sick with rheumatic fever. You see, there was an accident.”

“He met with an accident, you mean?”

“Yes. It was awful—or it might have been awful for him if he and I had not had signals that we use when there’s a fog on the lake. I’ll tell you.

"You see, there is a man named Shelton—Dr. Shelton—who lives in one of the grand houses at Braisely Park—you know, that is the rich people's summer colony at the upper end of the lake?"

"I know about it," said Wyn. "Although I never was there."

"Well, Dr. Shelton had his motor boat down at our float. He left it there himself, and he told father to go to the express office at Meade's Forge on a certain day and get a box that would be there addressed to Dr. Shelton. It was a valuable box.

"When father went for it the expressman would not give it up until he had telephoned to Dr. Shelton and recognized the doctor's voice over the wire. It seems that that box was packed with ancient silver images that had been found in a ruined temple in Yucatan, and had been sent to Dr. Shelton by the man who found them. They claim they were worth at the least five thousand dollars.

"The doctor had a party at his house right then, he said over the telephone, and he wanted father to come up the lake with the box. He wanted to display his antique treasures to his friends.

"Now, it was a dreadfully bad day. After father had started down to the Forge in the motor boat he knew that a storm was coming. And ahead of it was a thick fog. He told Dr. Shelton over the 'phone that it was a bad time to make the trip the whole length of Lake Honotonga.

"The doctor would not listen to any excuses, however; and it was his boat that was being risked. And his silver images, too! Those rich people don't care much about a poor man's life, and if father had refused to risk his on the lake in the storm Dr. Shelton would have given his trade to some other boatkeeper after that.

"So father started in the *Bright Eyes*. He did not shoot right up the middle of the lake, as he would have done had the day been fair. The lake is twenty miles broad, you know, in the middle. So he kept near our side—the south side it is—and did not lose sight of the shore at first.

"But at Gannet Island he knew he had better run outside. You see, the strait between the island and the shore is narrow and, when the wind is high, it sometimes is dangerous in there. Why, ten years ago, one of the little excursion steamers that used to ply the lake then, got caught in that strait and was wrecked!

"So father *had* to go outside of Gannet Island. The fog shut down as thick as a blanket before he more than sighted the end of the island. He kept on, remembering what Dr. Shelton had said, and that is where he made a mistake," said Polly, shaking her head. "He ought to have turned right around and come back to our landing."

"Oh, dear me! what happened to him?" cried Wyn, eagerly.

"The fog came down, thicker and thicker," proceeded the boatman's daughter. "And the wind rode down upon father, too. Wind and fog together are not usual; but when the two combine it is much worse than either alone. You see, the thick mist swirling into father's eyes, driven head-on by the wind, blinded him. He steered a shade too near the shore.

"Suddenly the *Bright Eyes* struck. A motor boat, going head-on upon a snag, can be easily wrecked. The boat struck and stuck, and father leaped up to shut off the engine.

"As he did so, something swished through the blinding fog and struck him, carrying him backward over the stern of the boat. Perhaps it was the loss of his weight that allowed the *Bright Eyes* to scrape over the snag. At least, she did so as father plunged into the lake, and as he sank he knew that the boat, with her engine at half speed, was tearing away across the lake.

"It was the drooping limb of a tree that had torn father from the stern of the motor boat," continued Polly Jarley. "It may have been a big root of the same tree, under water, that had proved the finish of the boat. For nobody ever saw the *Bright Eyes* again. She just ran off at a tangent, into the middle of the lake, somewhere, we suppose, and filled and sank."

"Oh, dear me! And your father?" asked Wyn, anxiously.

"He got ashore on the island. Then he signalled to me, and I went off during a lull in the storm, and got him. He went to bed, and it was three months before he was up and around again.

“He suffered dreadfully with rheumatic fever,” continued Polly, sadly. “And all the time Dr. Shelton was talking just as mean about him as he could. He didn’t believe his story. He even said that he thought my father took the motor boat down the river somewhere and sold it. And the way he talked about that box of silver images – ”

“Oh, oh!” cried Wyn. “I’d forgotten about them. Of course they were lost, too?”

“Sunk somewhere in Lake Honotonka,” declared Polly. “Father knows no more about where the boat lies than Dr. Shelton himself. But there are always people ready and willing to pick up the evil that is said about a person and help circulate it.

“While father was flat on his back, folks were talking about him. We had to raise money on the boats to pay for our food and father’s medicine. If we don’t have a good season this summer we will be unable to pay off the chattel mortgage next winter, and will lose the boats. I tell you, Miss Wyn, it is *hard*.”

“You poor, dear girl!” exclaimed Wyn. “I should think it *was* hard. And that mean man accuses your father – ”

“Well, you see, there was father’s past record against him. The story of his trouble here in Denton followed him into the woods, of course. If anybody gets mad at us up at the Forge, they throw the whole thing up to us. I—I *hate* it there,” sobbed the boatkeeper’s daughter.

“And yet, it is harder on poor father. He is straight, but everything has been against him. I saw he felt dreadfully these past few days because I need some decent clothes. And there is no money to buy any.

“So I thought I would come to town and see some old friends of mother’s who used to come and see us years ago. Yes, there were a few people who stuck to mother, even if they did not quite approve of poor father. But, when I paddled ’way down here – ”

“Not in a canoe?” cried Wyn.

“Yes, I came down very easily yesterday evening and stopped at a boatman’s house on the edge of town. I shall go back again to-day. The Wintinooski isn’t kicking up much of a rumpus just now. The spring floods are about all over.”

“But you must be a splendid hand with a paddle,” said Wyn. “It’s a long way to the lake.”

“Oh! I don’t mind it,” said Polly. “Or, I *wouldn’t* mind it if it had done me the least good to come down here,” and she sighed.

“You are disappointed?” queried Wyn.

“Dreadfully! I did not find mother’s old friends. I had not heard from them for two or three years, and found that they were away—nobody knows where. I did not know but I might get work here in town for a few weeks, and live with these old friends, and so earn some money. I am so shabby! And father isn’t fit to be seen.

“And then—then there was a man in town who used to befriend mother. I know when I was quite a little girl, the year after we had gone to the woods to live, father was ill for a long time and mother had to have things. She went to this storekeeper in Denton and he let her have things on account and we paid him afterward. Oh, we paid him—every cent!” declared Polly, again wiping her eyes.

“And I hoped he would—for mother’s sake—help us again. I went to him. I—I reminded him of how father once worked for him, and that he knew mother. But he was angry about something—he would not listen—he would neither give me work nor let me have goods charged. I—I—well, it just broke me down, Wyn Mallory, and I came here to cry it out.”

“It’s a shame!” exclaimed Wyn. “I am just as sorry for you as I can be. And I believe that your father is perfectly honest and that he never in his life intended to defraud anybody.”

It was that blessed *tact* that made Wynifred Mallory say that. It was the sure way to Polly Jarley’s heart; and Wyn’s words and way opened the door wide and Polly took her in.

“You—you *blessed* creature!” cried the boatman’s daughter. “I know you must have been ’specially sent to comfort me. I *was* so miserable.”

"Of course I was sent," declared Wyn. She did not propose to tell her new acquaintance that she had observed her in Erad's store and had looked for her all over Market Street.

"Such things are meant to be. If we trust to God we surely shall have release from our difficulties. That is just as sure as the day follows the night," declared Wyn, with simple, straightforward faith.

"And just see how it is proved in this case. You were in trouble, and sat here crying, and needed somebody to help you. And I came along perfectly willing and able to help you, and you are going to be helped."

"I *am* helped!" declared Polly. "You just put the courage back into me. I didn't know what to do –"

"Do you know any better now?" demanded Wyn, quickly.

"We–ell, I –"

"That doesn't sound as though you had *quite* made up your mind," said Wyn, with a little laugh.

"Never mind. I can stand even going back home with my hands empty, better than before I met you," declared Polly, bravely.

"But you won't go back home empty-handed."

"Oh, Wyn! Can you get me work?"

"No, not here. Nor do I believe you ought to leave your father alone up there for so long. I expect he is not very well yet?"

"No. He is not," admitted Polly.

"Then, you go home. That is the best place for you, anyway. But before you go you shall make such purchases as you may need –"

Polly drew away from her along the seat, and her gray eyes grew brighter. "Oh, Miss Mallory!" she murmured. "Don't do *that*."

"Don't do what?" demanded Wyn.

"Don't spoil it all."

"Spoil what-all?" cried Wyn, in exasperation. "I'm not going to spoil anything. But you listen to me. This is sense."

"I–I couldn't take charity from *you*– a stranger."

"I offer to lend you twenty dollars. You can pay it back when you choose."

"Twenty dollars! You lend me twenty dollars?"

"Yes. I have quite some spending money given to me, and I have been saving nearly all of it for some time. So I can easily spare it."

"But I don't know when I can repay you."

"I can tell you, then. You can pay me back this very summer."

"This summer, miss?"

"Don't call me 'miss'!" cried Wyn, in greater exasperation. "I have told you my name is 'Wyn'! And I mean exactly what I say. This is a perfectly straight business proposition," and she laughed her full-throated laugh that made even Polly Jarley, in her trouble, smile.

"Then your business, Wyn Mallory, must be the saving of people from trouble—is that it? For there is no reason in what you say you will do—Oh, I can't accept it. It would be charity!" cried Polly, again clasping Wyn's hands.

"It is not charity," said Wyn, firmly, opening her purse. "And I'll quickly show you why it is not. You see, Polly Jolly—and I want you to smile at me and look as though you fitted that name. You see, I am captain of the Go-Ahead Club."

"The Go-Ahead Club?"

"Yes. We are six girls. We each own canoes. And we are just *crazy* to spend next summer under canvas."

"You are going camping?"

“That is our intention,” Wyn said, nodding.

“Oh, then! come up to Lake Honotonka,” cried Polly. “I can show you beautiful places to camp, and we can have lots of fun – ”

“That likewise is our intention,” broke in Wyn. “We have just decided to camp for the summer on the shore of the lake. Rather, our parents, guardians, and the cat, have finally agreed to our plans. We shall come up there the week after the Academy closes.”

“Now, we want you, Polly, to find us the very best camping place, to arrange everything for us, and don’t have it too far from your place, and from Meade’s Forge. I expect the Busters will camp on one of the islands. The Busters, you see, are our boy friends who are likewise going to the lake. They were there last year with Professor Skillings.”

“I remember them,” said Polly, wonderingly. “And you and your girl friends are coming?”

“Just the surest thing you know, Polly,” declared Wyn. “So you are going to take this twenty dollars,” and she suddenly thrust the bill into the other girl’s hand and closed her fingers over it. “Then, next summer, we shall let you pay it back in perfectly legitimate charges, for we’ll want you and your father to help us a good deal.

“Now, what say, Polly Jolly? Will you please let your face fit your name—as I have rechristened you? Smile, my dear—smile!”

“I could cry again, Wyn—you are so kind!” half sobbed the other girl.

“Now, you stop all that foolishness—a great, big girl like you!” exclaimed Wyn. “Turn off the sprinkler, as Dave Shepard says. Get right up now and go briskly about your buying. And write to me when you get home and write just as often as you can till we meet at the lake this summer.”

“You dear!” ejaculated Polly.

“You’re another. How will I address you—at the Forge?”

“Yes, and you must give me your address,” said the boatman’s daughter, eagerly.

Wyn did so. The two girls, such recent but already such warm friends, kissed each other and Polly Jarley went briskly away toward Market Street. Wyn stopped on the bench for several minutes and watched the girl from Lake Honotonka walk away, while a smile wreathed her lips and a warm light lingered in her brown eyes.

CHAPTER V

BESSIE LAVINE

Suddenly a gay voice hailed Wyn.

"Hi, Captain of the Go-Aheads! What are you doing, mooning here?"

"Why, Bess!" returned Wyn, turning to greet Bessie Lavine. "I didn't see you coming along."

"No; but I saw you, my noble captain."

"Going shopping?"

"Aye, aye, Captain!" cried the other member of the Go-Ahead club. "But who was that I saw you with? Didn't I see you talking to that girl who just crossed Benefit Street?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who was she?"

"Polly Jarley. She is daughter of a boatman up at the lake. And wasn't it fortunate that I met her? She can find us a camping place and get everything fixed up there for our coming."

"What's her name?" asked Bess, sharply.

"Polly Jarley."

"And she lives up there by the lake?"

"So she says."

"Her father is John Jarley, of course?" queried Bessie, looking down at Wyn, darkly.

"Yes. That is her father's name," said Wyn, beginning to wonder at her friend's manner.

"Well! I guess you don't know those Jarleys very well; do you?"

"Why—I –"

Wyn hesitated to tell Bessie that she had only just now met the unfortunate boatman's daughter. She remembered Polly's story, and what she had overheard Mr. Erad say in the drygoods store.

"You surely *can't* know what and who they are, and still be friendly with that girl?" repeated Bessie, her eyes flashing with anger.

"Why, my dear," said Wyn, soothingly. "Don't speak that way. Sit down and tell me what you mean. I certainly have not known Polly long; and I never met her father –"

"Oh, they left this town a long time ago."

"So she told me. And she said something about her father having been accused of dishonesty –"

"I should say so!" gasped Bessie. "Why, John Jarley almost ruined *my* father. He was a traitor to him. They were in a deal together—it was when my father first tried to get into the real estate business here in Denton—and this John Jarley sold him out. Why, everybody knows it! It crippled father for a long time, and what Jarley got out of playing traitor never did him any good, I guess, for they were soon as poor as Job's turkey, and they went to live in the woods there. He's a poor, miserable wretch. Father says he's never had a stroke of luck since he played him such a mean trick—and serves him right!"

Wyn stared at her in amazement, for Bessie had gone on quite breathlessly and had spoken with much heat. Finally Wyn observed:

"Well, dear, *your* father has done well since those days. They say he is one of our richest citizens. Surely you can forgive what poor John Jarley did, for he and his daughter are now very miserable."

"I don't see why we should forgive them," cried Bessie, hotly.

"Why, Bess! This poor girl had nothing to do with her father wronging your father –"

"I don't care. She's his daughter. It's in the blood. I wouldn't trust her a single bit. I wouldn't speak to her. And no girl can be *her* friend and mine, too!"

"Why, Bess! don't say that," urged Wyn. "You and I have been friends for years and years. We wouldn't want to have a falling out."

"I see no need for us to fall out," exclaimed Bessie, her eyes still flashing. "But I just won't associate with girls who associate with those low people—there now!"

"Now do you feel better, Bess?" asked Wyn, laughing.

That was the worst of Wyn Mallory! All the girls said so. One couldn't "fight" with her. For, you see, it takes two at least to keep a quarrel alive, although but one to start it.

"Well, you don't know how mean that man, Jarley, was to my father. And years ago they were the very best of friends. Why! they went to school together, and were chums—just as thick as you and I are, Wynnie—just as thick. And for him to be a traitor – "

"If he was, don't you think he has been paying for it?" asked Wyn, sensibly. "According to what I hear he is poor, and ill, and unfortunate – "

"I don't know whether he is or not. It was only a few weeks ago we heard of his stealing a motor boat up there at the lake and some other valuables, and selling them – "

"He wouldn't be poor if he had done that; would he?" interrupted Wyn. "For I know for a fact that he is very, very poor."

She did not want to tell Bessie that she had given Polly Jarley money; but she did not believe that the boatman's daughter would be in need as she was if Mr. Jarley were guilty of the crime of which he had been so recently accused.

"Well, I haven't a mite of sympathy for them," declared Bessie.

"Perhaps you cannot be expected to have sympathy for the Jarleys," admitted Wyn, in her wholesome way. "But you won't mind, will you, dear, if *I* have a little for poor Polly?" and she hugged Bessie, who had sat down, close to her. "Come on, Bessie—don't be mad at *me*."

"Oh, dear! nobody can be mad at you, Wyn Mallory. You do blarney so."

"Ah, now, my dear; it isn't blarneying at all!" laughed Wyn. "It's just showing you the sensible way. We girls don't want to be flighty, and have 'mads on,' as Frank says, for no real reason. And this poor girl will never trouble you in the world – "

"I wish she wasn't up at that lake," declared Bessie.

"Why, Bess! the lake's plenty big enough," said Wyn, chuckling. "We won't have to see much of the Jarleys. Although – "

"I sha'n't go if she is to be on hand," asserted Bessie, with vehemence.

"One would think poor Polly Jarley had an infectious disease. She won't hurt you, Bess."

"I don't care. I feel just as papa does about it. He and Jarley were closer than brothers. But he wouldn't speak to Jarley now—no, sir! And I don't want anything to do with that girl."

With this Bess jumped up, preparing to go on her way to the stores. Wyn was going home, and she gathered up her packages.

"You'll think differently about it some day, Bess," she said, thoughtfully, as her friend tripped away. "How foolish to hold rancor so long! For years and years those two men have hated each other. And I expect Polly would dislike Bess just as Bess dislikes her—and for no real reason!"

"And it seems too bad. Mr. Lavine is very rich while John Jarley is very poor. Usually it is the wicked man who prospers—for a time, at least I really don't understand this," sighed Wyn, traveling homeward. "If Polly's father is guilty as they believe he is, what did he do with the money he must have made by his crimes?"

CHAPTER VI

OFF FOR THE LAKE

Although the members of the Go-Ahead Club—some of them, at least—had expressed the wish that the time to start for Lake Honotonka was already at hand, the remaining days of May and the busy month of June slipped away speedily. At odd hours there was a deal to do to prepare for the outing which the girl canoeists longed to enjoy.

Wyn received several letters from Polly Jarley, more hopeful letters than she might have expected considering the situation in which the boatman's daughter was placed. Evidently Polly was trying to live up to her "rechristening."

In reply Wyn made several arrangements for the big outing which she confided only in a general way to the club. Polly had selected a beautiful spot just east of the rough water behind Gannet Island, and not half a mile from her father's boathouse, for the camping place of the Go-Ahead Club, and she wrote Wyn that she had stuck up a sign pre-empting the spot for the girls from Denton.

It was arranged with the Busters, who would go up to Lake Honotonka the same day as the Go-Aheads, to send the stores together by bateau. Wyn arranged to have the girls' stores housed by the Jarleys, for she did not think that the canvas of either the sleeping or the cook-tent would be sufficient protection if there came a heavy storm.

The boys had picked their camping place the year before. They would go to the far end of Gannet Island, where there was a cave which promised a fairly good storehouse for their goods and chattels. They proposed to erect their one big tent right in front of this cavity in the rock—in conjunction therewith, in fact. There was a backbone of rock through the center of the island in which Professor Skillings, as a geologist, was very much interested, and had been for a long time.

To purchase the stores cost considerable money. The girls had to do it all out of their own pockets, and to tell the truth some of them had to mortgage their spending allowance for the entire summer to "put up" their pro rata sum for these supplies.

"Papa says it is going to cost me as much as though I were spending the summer at Newport," Percy Havel said, with a sigh.

"My folks have expressed some surprise," admitted Mina Everett. "They thought we were going to camp out *al fresco*; but they can scarcely believe now that we are not going to live upon *pâté de foie gras* and have a French chef to get up the meals."

"My father began to say something about the cost the other night," giggled Frank Cameron. "But I put the stopper on poor pa very quickly. I told him that I'd willingly give up the camping-out scheme if he'd buy a touring car. I said:

"Pa, I've figured the whole thing out, and we can do it easily enough. The car, to begin with, will cost \$5,000, which at six per cent, is only \$300 a year. If we charge ten per cent, off for depreciation it will come to \$500 more. A good chauffeur can be had for \$125 per month, or \$1,500 per year. I have allowed \$10 per week for gasoline and \$5 for repairs. The chauffeur's uniform and furs will come to about \$200. Now, let's see what it comes to. Three hundred, plus five hundred, and then the chauffeur's salary at —'

"Don't bother me any more, my dear,' says pa. 'I know what it comes to.'

"What *does* it come to, Pa?' I asked. 'How quick you are at figures!'

"My dear,' he said, impressively, 'it comes to a standstill right here and now. We will have no touring car. I'll say no more about the Go-Ahead Club.'

"Oh, you can manage the grown-ups," concluded Frank, with a laugh, "if you go about it right."

The bateau of stores went up the Wintinooski two days before the girls and boys were to start; yet for fear that all might not have gone right with the provisions, Wyn insisted that each member

of the Go-Ahead. Club pack in her canoe the usual "day's ration" that they had been taught should always be carried for an emergency.

"It only adds to the weight," grumbled Grace. "And dear knows, the old blankets and things that you make us paddle about, makes the going hard enough."

"That's it—kick!" exclaimed Frank. "You'd kick if your feet were tied, Gracie."

"Assuredly!" returned the big girl.

"Now, don't fuss at the rules of the club that have long ago been voted upon and adopted," said Wyn, cheerfully. "We do not know what is going to happen. Somebody might hit a snag. It would take hours to make repairs—perhaps we would have to camp for the night somewhere on the way. We want to be prepared for all such emergencies."

"Well, the Busters aren't loading themselves down with all this truck," declared Grace, with vigor.

"That's all right. Let us be the wise ones," laughed Wynifred. "The boys may want to borrow of us before we get to Lake Honotonga."

"Why, Wynnie!" cried Bess Lavine, "if you are expecting all sorts of breakdowns and misfortunes, I shall be afraid to start at all."

"Guess I'll go on with Aunt Evelyn to the Forge, and send my canoe by train," laughed Percy Havel. "Wyn's got us drowned already."

But on the morning of the departure not one of the girls prophesied misfortune. As for the boys, they were bubbling over with fun.

Professor Skillings was going to paddle up the river with them, although Mrs. Havel would take the afternoon train to the lake. The professor had gone on ahead; but Dave Shepard arranged the two clubs in line and boys and girls marched through the streets and down to the river, being hailed by their friends and bidden good-bye by their less fortunate mates.

Somebody started singing, and the twelve young voices were soon in the rhythm of "This is the Life!" Dave and Tubby were ahead, their paddles over their shoulders, each carrying his blanket-roll in approved scout fashion. The roll made Tubby Blaisdell look twice his real size.

As the party struck across the sward toward the boathouses Dave suddenly dropped his paraphernalia and started on a run for the river.

"Hi, there!" he shouted. "The professor is in trouble, boys!"

The Busters bounded away after him, and the girls, catching the excitement, followed along the bank of the swiftly-flowing Wintinooski. There was Professor Skillings in his canoe, drifting rapidly into the middle of the current, and plainly without his paddle. Indeed, that useful—not to say necessary—instrument, capped the pile of Professor Skillings' impedimenta on the bank. He had evidently—in his usual absent-minded manner—stepped into his canoe and pushed off from shore without getting his cargo aboard.

Amid much laughter Dave and Ferd Roberts got a skiff and went after their teacher. Professor Skillings chuckled at his own troubles. Although he was well past the meridian of life, he had neither lost his sense of the ridiculous nor his ability to laugh at a joke when it was on himself.

While the boys were rescuing their friend and mentor, the Go-Ahead Club proceeded to get out their own canoes and load them. The weight had to be distributed in bow and stern of the light, cedar craft; but Wyn and her mates had practised loading and launching their boats so frequently that there was little danger of an upset now.

Grace was still growling about the food and cooking apparatus distributed among the canoeists. Wyn said, laughing:

"That is still the bone of contention; is it, Gracie?"

"What is a 'bone of contention'?" demanded Mina, innocently.

"Why, the jawbone, of course, silly!" cried Frank.

"Don't you mind about my jawbone, miss!" snapped Grace.

“Oh, don’t let’s fight, girls,” Mina said, soothingly.

“Better a dinner of herbs with contentment than a stalled ox and trouble on the side,” misquoted Frank.

The six girls quickly shot their canoes out into the stream. At this point the current was swift; but above Denton the river broadened into wide pools through which the current flowed sluggishly and it would be easier paddling.

The girls set into a steady stroke, led by their captain, and passed the pretty town in a few minutes. Wyn could see the upper windows of her home and noted a white cloth fluttering from one. She knew that her mother was standing there with the field-glasses and Baby May. Perhaps the little one was trying to see “sister” through the strong glasses.

So Wyn pulled off her cap and swung it over her head and the six canoes immediately fell out of alignment.

“Don’t do that, Wyn!” shouted Bess. “Those boys will catch up with us.”

“Well, we want them to; don’t we?” asked the captain of the Go-Aheads, good-naturedly. “We’re going to lunch together, and if we make the poor boys work too hard they’ll eat every crumb we’ve got and leave nothing for poor little we-uns.”

“So *that’s* why you made us bring all this food?” demanded Bess, in disgust. “Can’t those boys feed themselves?”

“Oh, they’ll do their share,” Wyn replied, laughing. “You’ll see. Don’t you see how heavily laden Tubby’s canoe is? I warrant he has enough luncheon aboard for a small army.”

“I can’t look over my shoulder—I never can,” quoth Bessie. “Paddling a canoe takes more of my attention than riding a bicycle.”

“Or a motorcycle. Those things are just awful,” cried Mina Everett.

“Shucks!” exclaimed the lively Frankie. “A motorcycle is only an ordinary bicycle driven crazy by over-indulgence in gasoline.”

“How smart!” cried Bessie. “But you’d better save your breath to cool your porridge – ”

“Or, better still, to work your paddle,” commented Grace, with a swift glance behind. “Those Busters are coming up the river, hand over fist.”

“With poor Tubby in the rear, of course,” said Frank, glancing back. “The tide is certainly against *him*.”

“Oh, dear me!” giggled Percy, “poor Tubby was more than ‘tide’ last week when he took Annabel Craven out on the river. Did you hear about it? You know—the night before graduation.”

“I believe that fat youth is sweet on Annabel,” announced Bessie, shaking her head seriously.

“What do you suppose Ann thinks of Tubby?” cried Grace.

“You know how it is,” chuckled Frank. “Nobody loves a fat boy. Go on, Percy. What happened to poor old Tubby?”

“Why, he inveigled Annabel down to the river and got her into a boat and was going to row her around in the moonlight. You know it was just a scrumptious night.”

“M-m-m! wasn’t it?” agreed Frank.

“Well,” said Percy, “Tubby got in without overturning the boat and settled to work. The current was pretty swift and he struck right out into it and headed up stream.

“And there he tugged, and tugged, and tugged, giving all his attention to the oars and having none to spare for Annabel. By and by, after Tubby had tugged, and grunted, and perspired for half an hour, he said:

“Say, I never saw anything like this current to-night—not in all my born days! I’ve been pulling like a horse for half an hour and I don’t see that we’ve made as much as a dozen feet!”

“And then Annabel spoke up real pretty, and says she:

“Oh, Mr. Blaisdell! I’ve just thought of something. The anchor fell overboard some time ago and I forgot to tell you. Do you suppose it could have caught on something?”

The other girls were intensely amused at this, for they all appreciated Annabel Craven's character as well as poor Tubby's good-natured blundering. But while they laughed and chattered in this way the Busters crept steadily up on them.

"I told you how it would be," said Bess, tartly, "if we didn't hurry up."

"What's the matter with you girls?" demanded Dave Shepard. "One would think you were sent for and couldn't come, by the way you paddle. You'll get to the lake before noon at this rate."

"Not much danger of that, Davie," returned Wyn. "And you know we agreed to stop at Ware's Island for lunch."

"Oh, I wish that was right here!" grunted a voice from the rear, where Tubby Blaisdell was paddling away with almost as much splashing as a small side-wheel steamer.

"My goodness, boy!" cried Ferd Roberts. "You're not hungry so soon, are you?"

"Soon?" repeated Tubby, with disgust "It's so long since breakfast that I've forgotten what I had to eat."

"What do you want to eat, Tubby?" asked Frank, giggling.

"Not particular. Anything—from a marshmallow cake to a tough steak," grunted the fat boy.

"Tubby wouldn't be as particular as the grouchy gentleman who went into the restaurant out West and ordered a steak," chuckled Dave. "After the waiter brought it the customer tried his knife on it and then called the waiter back.

"Say!" he objected. "This steak isn't tender enough."

"Not tender enough, stranger?" returned the cowboy waiter. "What d'you expect? Want it to hug an' kiss yer?"

When the laugh on Tubby had subsided Professor Skillings said, with a twinkle in his eye:

"Our friend, Blaisdell, should be able to exist some time on his accumulation of fat. He ought not to seriously suffer from hunger as yet."

"Like a camel living on its hump—eh?" said Wyn. "How about that, Tubby?"

"I'm no relation to a camel—I tell you that," snorted the fat boy, with disgust.

"Then Mr. Blaisdell might imitate some insects; mightn't he, Professor Skillings?" suggested Frank, with a sly look. "You know there are insects that live on nothing."

"On nothing?" exclaimed the professor, quickly. "Oh, no, young lady, you are mistaken. That is quite impossible."

"But, Professor! A moth lives on nothing; doesn't it?"

"No, indeed. How could that be?" cried the scientific gentleman, greatly perturbed by Frank's apparent display of ignorance.

"Why, moths eat holes; don't they?" chortled Frank. "Surely 'holes' are a pretty slim diet."

Professor Skillings led the laughter himself over this simple joke. But he added:

"I fear I should not be able to interest you in science, Frances."

"Not in summer, sir—oh, never!" cried Frank. "I refuse to learn a single, living thing until school opens again next fall."

In spite of Tubby's complaints, the canoeing party sighted Ware Island in good season for luncheon. This was a low, wooded spot around which the Wintinooski—split in two streams—flowed very quietly. The country on both sides was cut up into farms, with intervening patches of woods, dotted with ferns, and was very beautiful.

There was a little beach on one side of the island, with a green, shaded bank above. This was a favorite picnicking spot for parties from Denton; but our friends had the island all to themselves this day.

The girls had been as far as this island before in their canoes; but never beyond. From this spot on the journey up the Wintinooski would be all new to Wyn Mallory and her chums.

The canoes were hauled up out of the water and the boys skirmished for fuel while the girls got out the luncheon. Ferd Roberts was fire-builder, and Grace, who hated that work, watched him

closely, marveling how quickly and well he constructed the pyre and had a blaze merrily dancing among the sticks.

“Doesn’t that beat all!” cried Grace. “You must love fires as much as Nero did.”

“Nero? Let’s see—he was the chap that always was cold; wasn’t he?” queried Ferd, grinning.

“Nope!” broke in Frank. “That was Zero. You *will* get your ancient history mixed, Ferd!”

The luncheon was quickly laid, and Tubby was not the only one who did it justice. But Bessie Lavine continued to act disagreeably toward the boys. She was “forever nagging,” as Dave said; and sometimes there was a spark of fire when she managed to get one or another of the boys “mad.”

Professor Skillings wandered off with his bag and little geological hammer and Tubby rolled over on his back under a shady bush and went to sleep.

“Pig!” ejaculated Bess, in disgust. “That’s all boys think of—their stomachs.”

“Oh, don’t be so hateful, Bess,” advised Frank. “Come on; the rest of us are going to walk around a little to settle our luncheon, before tackling the paddles again.”

“Humph! with the boys?” snapped Bess, seeing Wyn start off with Dave by her side. “Not me, thank you!”

“All right,” chuckled Frank Cameron. “You can keep Tubby company.”

But that suggestion made Bess even more angry, and she went off with her nose in the air, and all alone. But as the crowd of young folk came around the east end of Ware Island, they, saw Bess standing upon the brink of a steep bank, under a small tree, where the water had washed out a good deal of the earth in a sort of cave beneath where she stood.

“Hi, Bessie! get back from there!” shouted Dave, warningly. “That place is likely to cave in.”

“Then you certainly *would* get a ducking,” added Frank.

“Pooh! I guess I know what I’m about,” said the girl. “I’m no baby.”

“You’re acting like one,” growled Dave. “That place is dangerous.”

“It’s not, Mr. Smartie!” cried Bess, and she stamped her foot in anger.

And just as though that had been the signal for which it had been waiting, several square yards of the steep bank, with the tree she was clinging to, slumped down into the river.

The girls screamed, while the boys bounded forward toward the spot where Bessie had disappeared.

“Oh, Dave!” cried Wyn. “Save her! save her! She can’t swim very well. She will be drowned!”

CHAPTER VII

THE STORM BREAKS

Dave Shepard, followed by the other "Busters," leaped down to the edge of the water before they came to the spot where the bank had caved. They feared that by tramping along the edge they might bring down even a greater avalanche than had fallen with the unfortunate Bessie.

"There she is, fellows!" cried Dave. "She's hanging to the tree!"

"I see her!" returned Ferd Roberts.

"Oh, Dave! we can't reach her," cried another of the Busters.

"I wish the professor was here," cried Ferd. "He'd know what to do."

"My goodness!" returned Dave, throwing off his coat and cap. "I don't need anybody to tell me what to do. *We've got to go after her!*"

He tore off the low shoes he wore, pitched them after his cap and coat, and leaped into the water. The current tugged hard at the end of the island, and Bessie and the uprooted sapling were being carried out farther and farther into the stream.

The girl had not screamed. Indeed, she had been startled to such a degree when she went down that she had really not breath enough for speech as yet.

The boys were "right on the job," and only a few seconds elapsed from the moment the bank gave away until that in which Dave Shepard sprang into the river.

Some of the roots of the tree still clung to the shore. A part of the loosened earth had fallen upon these roots and so the tree was anchored. But Bessie was clinging to the hole of the sapling quite fifteen feet from the edge of the solid beach.

"Catch hold of hands, boys!" commanded Dave. "Make a chain! Give me one hand, Ferd! The current is tugging me right off my feet!"

His four mates obeyed orders promptly. Dave was captain of the Busters, as Wyn was of the Go-Ahead Club; and the boys had learned to obey their captain promptly—all but Tubby, at least. But Tubby was not in this exciting adventure at all, being asleep under the bush at their lunching place.

The fat boy was not even aroused when the crowd trooped back to the spot, boys and girls alike chattering like magpies. Dave and Ferd carried the dripping Bessie in "arm-chair" fashion and the girl who so disliked boys clung to her two chief rescuers with abandon.

They had hauled her out of the river just as she was losing her grasp on the tree. A moment later she might have been whirled down stream by the current and her life endangered. As it was, she had swallowed much water, and was just as wet inside and out as she would ever be in her life.

All the boys were more or less wet—Dave was saturated to his arm-pits. But the day was warm, and the boys were used to such duckings. It was another matter, however, with the girl. She was already shaking with an incipient chill.

"Wood on the fire, boys—get a lot of it," commanded Dave. "And get our blankets and let's put up a makeshift tent for Bess to use. She must get off her wet duds and wring them out and dry them. Hi! wake up that Tubby Blaisdell. We want his help."

Ferd proceeded to walk right over the fat youth on his way for more fuel and that effectually aroused the lad.

"Hey—you! what are you about?" yawned Tubby. "Can't you find another place to walk on but *me*, Ferd Roberts?"

"I've got to walk *somewhere*," quoth Ferd.

"Why! you're all wet," gasped Tubby. "And so are you, Dave! And those other fellows—I declare!"

"Wake up and do something, Tubby," commanded Dave. "We want to get a tent up, There's been an accident, and Bessie Lavine is wetter than any of us. Let's have your knife."

"My-my knife?" yawned Tubby, rolling over slowly to reach into his breeches pocket.

This was too good a chance for Ferd to resist. Tubby was rolling near the edge of the bank as Ferd came back with his arms full of broken branches. Ferd put his foot against Tubby's back and pushed with all his might.

"Hi! Stop that! Ugh!"

Tubby rolled over once—he rolled over twice; then, with many ejaculations and bumps rolled completely down the slope, amid the laughter of the boys and girls above him.

Tubby missed the canoes—by good luck—and rolled with a splash into a shallow pool at the river's edge.

"You mean thing!" he yelled, getting up with some alacrity and shaking his fist at Ferd. "I—I'm all wet."

"So are we, Tubby," Dave said. "You belong to our lodge now. Come on up here with that knife of yours. Didn't I tell you I wanted to use it?"

The other boys were scurrying after stakes and blankets, while the girls fed the fire till it roared high, and Bessie stood in the heat of the flames.

"What do you think of the boys *now*, Bess?" Frank Cameron whispered in the victim's ear. "Some good—at times—eh?"

"Now, don't worry her, Frank," commanded Mina, the tender-hearted. "The poor, dear girl! See—she's just as wet as she can possibly be."

"Oh, and wasn't I scared!" gasped Bess, honestly. "When that bank went down I thought I was right on my way through to China! I did, indeed."

"I was so thankful Dave was there," said Wyn Mallory, thoughtfully. "You see, Dave is one of those dependable boys."

"I've got to admit it," gasped Bess. "He's some good. Why! he caught me just as I was slipping off that tree. I *can't* thank him!"

"Never mind," said Wyn, cheerfully. "It is decided, I guess, that the boys may be of some use to us this summer, after all."

"That's so, if we're all going to run the risk of drowning," Grace Hedges observed.

"I am going to learn to swim better," declared Bess. "I'll just put my t-time all in on *that*. But, oh, girls! I am so wet!"

"Tent's ready, ladies!" shouted Dave Shepard. "Make her take her clothing off, Wyn. We fellows will get the professor and go over to the other side of the island for a swim. Ferd and I have got to strip off and wring out our trousers, anyway. And I reckon Tubby is some wet."

"That's all right," grumbled the fat youth, waddling after his mates. "I'll pay Ferd out for that—you see!"

The boys were back in an hour and a half. By that time Bess had been made quite presentable, for her garments had been dried over the fire. However, the girls were dressed in a way to stand—as well as might be—such accidents as Bessie had met.

The girl who had declared boys no good frankly shook hands with Dave before they embarked again, and thanked him very prettily for his help in time of need.

"Go ahead! get a medal for me," said Dave. "Pin it right *there*," and he pointed to the lapel of his jacket. "I'm a hero. Keep on praising me, Miss Lavine, and I'll grow as tall as a giraffe."

"And that's the highest form of animal life—ask the professor if it isn't," chuckled Frank Cameron.

But they were all very thankful that nothing serious had resulted from the accident. There was an after-result, however, that promised to be unpleasant. They had been so delayed at the island that

it was half-past three before they got off. There was still a long stretch to paddle to Meade's Forge at the foot of Honotonka Lake.

And, swiftly as they paddled, the sun was setting when they arrived at the Forge. Besides, a heavy cloud was coming up, threatening a storm. Indeed, lightning was already playing around the horizon behind them.

There was no hotel at the Forge, and no good place to stop for the night. Mrs. Havel was out in her canoe waiting for them. Gannet Island, where the boys were to camp, was in sight, and the camping place the girls had had selected for them was even nearer.

"We had better go at once," said the professor, earnestly. "We will stop and help you erect your tents first –"

"No, you will not," returned Mrs. Havel. "The girls and I have got to learn to be independent. Besides, your stores are waiting for you over there on the island, and I understand from the boatmen that the things are not yet under cover. You must hurry. We'll get along all right; won't we, girls?"

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