

Morrison Gertrude W.

**The Girls of Central High on
Lake Luna: or, The Crew That
Won**



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	18
CHAPTER VI	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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CHAPTER I

THE LONE MAN ON THE ISLAND

"There! I see him again," whispered Dora Lockwood.

A half-minute's silence, save for the patter of the drops from the paddles as the light cedar canoe shot around East Point of Cavern Island.

"So do I!" cried Dorothy, but in a low tone. "My! what frightful whiskers."

"He looks just like a pirate," declared her sister.

"He *is* a pirate – or a robber – I wager," returned Dorothy.

"Maybe he's one of those horrid men who robbed Stresch & Potter Tuesday night."

"Oh, Dora! Let's hurry by."

Both girls redoubled their efforts at the paddles and the canoe shot past the little cove which lay at the foot of the eminence known as Boulder Head. The black hair and ferocious whiskers of the person upon whom they made these comments dipped down behind a big rock on the shore and disappeared.

"There! he's gone," sighed Dora, with relief.

"I'm glad. *Do* you suppose he had anything to do with the robbery at Stresch & Potter's department store? They say the thieves got more than ten thousand dollars."

"I don't know whether the lone pirate is one of them or not," laughed Dora; "but *somebody* must have committed the robbery – and why not he?"

"That's heartless," sniffed Dorothy. "They say that a small boy helped the robbers, too. They had to push a boy through the wire screen they cut out, and he opened a cellar door to let the robbers in."

"Don't I know that? And don't I know who is suspected, too?" returned Dora.

"Oh, Dora! Don't say it!" protested Dorothy, in horror.

"I don't say I believe it. But you know very well that Billy is up to all sorts of mischief."

"But Billy Long is one of our own boys."

"I know he goes to Central High. But all the boys who go to our school are not angelic."

"Far from it," sighed her sister, pensively.

"And 'Short and Long' is a regular little *snipe*, sometimes!" said Dora, with emphasis.

"But to rob a store!" gasped her twin sister.

"He was seen around there the afternoon before. Why, I know that a policeman has been to his house looking for him, and nobody has seen Short and Long since Thursday night."

"But the robbery was committed some time Tuesday night."

"He wasn't suspected at first. Perhaps he thought nobody had noticed him helping the men in the afternoon."

"If they were the men – those surveyors."

"Of course they were!" cried Dora. "The city engineer's office sent no men to run that street line. Those fellows were taking measurements right back of Stresch & Potter's building – and Short and Long was helping them. And, now, when the hue and cry is raised, he's gone."

"Oh, Dora! It would be dreadful," sighed Dorothy. "One of our Central High boys."

"And one that's always been just as full of mischief as an egg is full of meat," snapped Dora.

Now, supposing there had been a blind person in the canoe with the Lockwood sisters, that unfortunate person could never in this world have told which girl spoke at each time. Their voices were exactly alike – the same inflection, the same turning of phrases, the exact tone.

Nor could this supposititious blind person – had his eyes been suddenly opened – have been able to tell the girls apart, either!

For Dora and Dorothy Lockwood were exactly the same height, of the same physical development, and with the same mannerisms and carriage. Both had a wealth of rather light brown hair, and that hair was tied with ribbons of exactly the same shade, and tied in exactly the same kind of bow. They possessed two pairs of very nice gray eyes, usually sparkling with fun. Each had a dimple at the left side of her pretty lips, and when they smiled that dimple came into prominence at once. The turn of their chins, the shape of their noses and ears, the breadth of their foreheads – every feature was the same. One's reflection in the looking-glass could be no more exactly like the original than was her sister.

So, unless some person was near enough to watch the play of the twins' lips, it would have been impossible to tell which girl spoke.

They had been paddling for some time – from the boat landing at the Girls' Branch Athletic Field of Central High, at Centerport, to the East Point of Cavern Island, and beyond.

Lake Luna was a beautiful body of water some twenty miles in length and a half-mile broad. Cavern Island lay in its middle directly opposite the city of Centerport. At the upper, or west end of the lake, lay Lumberport, another lively town, at the mouth of Rocky River; and at the far eastern end of the lake its waters flowed out through Rolling River at the city of Keyport.

Back of the city of Centerport, which was by far the largest and most important of the three, was a range of beautiful hills – hills which were now clothed in their mantle of full summer verdure. There was, about in the middle of the big town, a slight elevation occupied by the best residences. This "hill section" of Centerport was flanked on either hand by business portions of the city; but on the lake shore side of the Hill there were beautiful estates, boat clubs, bathing pavilions, and the new Athletic Field established for the use of the girls of Central High School, at which institution the Lockwood twins were pupils in their sophomore year.

The twins were, too, dressed alike, in very pretty blue and white boating costumes, with broad-brimmed canvas hats; but despite these hats they were as brown as berries, and the red blood showed through the tan on their cheeks like the hue of blush-roses. Their arms, bared to the elbow, were very brown, too.

A number of the girls of Central High were possessed of canoes; but none was a better paddler than the Lockwood twins. Either singly, or together, Dora and Dorothy, in competition with most of their mates, whether of sophomore, junior or senior class, could hold their own. Besides the twins rowed respectively Number 6 and Number 2 in the eight-oared shell.

For some few months now the girls of Central High had been particularly enthusiastic about athletics of all kinds. They were rivals for all athletic honors with the two other high schools of Centerport – the East and West Highs – as well as with the high school girls of Lumberport and Keyport.

Recently there had been a rowing race between these high school crews of eight, and the girls of Central High had been beaten. There were coming soon, however, the annual boat races and other aquatic sports on Lake Luna which were each year contested and supported by the athletic clubs of the three cities of the lake.

It was an all-day tournament, and it always embraced swimming, rowing and paddling for prizes, as well as fun in the shape of "bunting," water-polo, marine hare and hounds, and other games. But if the truth were told, the main interest of the Lockwood twins and their girl friends was at present centered in the eight-oared shell race between the five high schools.

As the twins swept on in their canoe, and turned Boulder Head, hiding the place where they had seen the bewhiskered poll of the individual whom Dora had called the lone pirate, she said:

"Do you suppose, Dory, that anybody will be good enough to really present the crew with a new shell?"

"Somebody's got to – if Central High is to win," declared Dorothy, vigorously.

"That's so. We can never beat East High with our old tub – let alone the Lumberport or Keyport eight."

"Leave it to Mother Wit," laughed Dorothy. "She has her thinking cap on."

"But we can't leave everything to Laura Belding," declared Dora. "She shouldn't be called upon to do everything. She got Colonel Richard Swayne interested in our Girls' Branch Athletic League, and so we are to have a fine new field, they say. That's enough for Laura to do."

"But Mother Wit is always turning up unexpectedly with something new," laughed Dorothy. "And she says we must have a new shell in time to use it in the race on the big day."

"Who's launch is that, Dory?" asked her sister, suddenly.

A motor-boat had just come into sight around a point of the island ahead.

"Why – why – Isn't that Pretty Sweet's *Duchess*?" asked Dorothy.

"Maybe. It's missing explosions dreadfully. Nasty thing! I don't like a motor boat."

"Well, a canoe or a sailboat is more fun, I believe, unless you want to go fast," said the other twin.

"Speed up, Dory. We can cross the bow of that boat. It *is* Purt's boat."

"And there are two other boys aboard."

"Chet and Lance, I declare!"

"Laura said she and Jess were coming over to the island to-day; funny the boys aren't with them."

"Then somebody else would have to go with Purt, for he could never run that motor alone. Oh, look!"

As Dorothy spoke there was a big puff of smoke from the middle of the launch and they heard the boys shouting excitedly.

"Now you've done it, Purt!" was an exclamation the twins heard.

Then flames shot up where the smoke had been and the twins both cried out.

"Their gasoline's afire! It's the tank!" exclaimed Dora.

She had scarcely spoken when there came a muffled report, another great balloon of smoke, and the launch seemed to be afire from end to end. Out of the smoke and flames three figures, one after the other, leaped into the lake, while the burning launch darted on across the path of the girls' canoe.

CHAPTER II

MISSING: THE SHORT AND LONG OF IT

"Oh! Oh!" cried Dora. "I hope they're not burned."

"But they'll be drowned!" gasped her sister.

"Chetwood Belding and Lance Darby won't drown, that's sure," returned Dora, but driving in her paddle vigorously.

"No, they can swim."

"And they won't let Prettyman Sweet drown, either."

The girls swept on at a splendid pace, paying no attention to the runaway and burning launch. They were anxious to reach the struggling boys.

"We can't take them aboard, Dora!" cried her sister.

"Of course not; but they can cling to the gun-wales – "

"And sink us."

"No, they won't."

"They'll tip us over. I don't want to get all wet," panted Dorothy.

"Here's another canoe!" cried Dora.

Out of a neighboring inlet shot a second cedar boat, also paddled by two girls.

"It's Laura and Jess!" cried Dorothy.

"Goody! now we can get the boys to shore all right," said Dora, with satisfaction. "Laura will know what to do. She always does."

Laura Belding, who was Chetwood Belding's sister, and who rejoiced in the nickname at school of "Mother Wit," was a girl who possessed a very quick mind. Her mates expected a good deal of her, therefore, and it was not surprising that Dora and Dorothy Lockwood should consider that the rescue of the three boys in the lake was a simple matter now that Laura had appeared upon the scene.

In the first volume of this series, entitled "The Girls of Central High; Or, Rivals for All Honors," Laura Belding's quick wit was displayed on several occasions – notably in her solving the problem of a fire that was discovered in the office of the principal of Central High School, Franklin Sharp.

But in that initial volume was told, too, of the beginning of after-hour athletics in Central High and of the interest the girls began to take in all manner of sports and games approved by the Girls' Branch Athletic League.

The girls of Central High had ever been loyal supporters of the boys' games – had "rooted" at all baseball, football, and rowing matches, and the like, for their particular colors; but now they were to take part themselves in various lines of athletics and sports, and their real interest in such things was, naturally, much increased.

But to properly develop the idea of the Girls' Branch Athletic League, which was formed at Central High, the need of a modern girls' athletic field was plain to both the girls themselves and their instructors. Centerport, although a moderately wealthy town, could not supply fifty thousand dollars, off-hand, for such a purpose; and that was the least sum needed for the establishment of an up-to-date building and field for winter bathing, basketball grounds, tennis courts, a cinder track, and a dancing lawn.

Perhaps Laura Belding was no more interested in the establishment of such a fine field than many other of the girls of the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Laura was a soph herself; but she saw ways and means to an end more quickly than the others. By chance she interested a very wealthy man – one Colonel Richard Swayne. The Colonel thought that little Miss Belding was quite the quickest-witted girl he had ever met. And, later, when Laura's bright thought chanced to aid

the Colonel's invalid daughter, the old gentleman began to take a deeper interest in the things that interested Laura.

So that, finally, through Colonel Swayne's generosity, the idea of a fine field for girls' athletics became a possibility. This coming summer, during the long vacation, it would be built, and the girls of Laura's class were very proud indeed of "Mother Wit."

Now the two canoes, propelled by the twins in one and Laura and her chum, Jess Morse, in the other, dashed toward the three boys in the water. The power launch, flaming merrily, was allowed to take its own sweet will across the lake.

"Now, don't you tip either of those canoes over, Purt!" Chet Belding was angrily shouting as the girls reached the trio of water-soaked voyagers. "Easy! You're not drowned yet."

"But, mercy, Chet!" squalled Prettyman Sweet, splashing madly. "I – I've swallowed – ugh! – so mu-mu-much water! Help!"

He went under again, for he could not swim. But Chet brought him up with a jerk, having still a hand upon the boy's collar.

"Stay up here!" growled Laura's brother. "Keep your face out of the water."

"But I want to, deah boy – dontcher know!" gasped Purt.

"Yes; you want to; but you want to talk, too. Keep your mouth shut, then you won't get water-logged," snapped Lance Darby, coming up on the other side.

"Oh! don't be harsh with him, boys," begged Dorothy Lockwood. "He's lost his boat."

"And that's his own fault. He *would* smoke a cigarette," said Chet, "and I told him the gasoline leaked."

"I wouldn't go in the old boat with him again for a farm down East with a pig on it!" declared Lance. "Now, easy! don't you dare swamp this canoe."

They made the almost helpless Purt seize the sharp stern of Laura's canoe with both hands. Then Chet swam beside him to keep him from dragging the girls' craft down, as Laura and Josephine Morse paddled for the shore of the island.

Lance followed on with the Lockwood canoe, and both reached the shore at about the same time. The Sweet boy struggled out upon the shore and lay down, almost overcome. But the other boys aided the girls in getting the cedar boats onto the shore, and out of harm's way.

"Nice mess we're in," gasped Lance, flinging himself down upon the sod, too. "Look at us! Not fit to appear on board the *Lady of the Lake*." That was the little steamer that transported passengers from Centerport to the amusement park at the west end of Cavern Island. Down at this end of the island the land was hilly and wild; but around the boat landing a park was laid out, with carrousels, a small menagerie, swings, and the like.

"Lo – lo – look at Purt!" burst out Jess, unable to hold in her laughter any longer. "What-what will his mo-mo-mother say when he gets home?"

Prettyman Sweet was, as Chet often declared, "the very niftiest dresser" in Central High. And even when he went motor-boating he was the very "glass of fashion." His fancy waistcoat would never be seen in its pristine lustre again, and as for the gaudy striped shirt and cuffs he had worn, the stripes were surely "fast" colors, in that they had immediately run into the white ground-work of the garment!

"I – I do-do-don't care," chattered Purt. "What are clothes, anyway? I'm dying of cold!"

"And in June," snorted Lance, with disgust.

"Let's build a campfire and warm him," suggested Laura.

"Haven't a dry match," declared her brother.

"I have. Don't catch me canoeing without a tightly corked bottle of matches. I've been upset too many times," laughed Laura.

Chet and Lance gathered the wood; but Purt only lay and moaned and shivered. The adventure was a serious matter for the exquisite.

"And I bet this settles Purt's motor-boating for all time," scoffed Jess Morse. "Got enough, haven't you, Pretty?"

"Weally, Miss Morse, I am too exhausted to speak about it – weally!" gasped Purt.

"And it was the only sport Purt would go into," grunted Chet. "He could get somebody to run his boat for him, you see. All he had to do was to sit tight and hold his ears on."

Purt felt affectionately for his ears – they stuck out like sails from the side of his head, "trimmed flat across the masts" – and said nothing. He could not retort in his present condition of mind and body. But his schoolmates talked on, quite ignoring him.

"What were you two boys doing out in the *Duchess* this afternoon, anyway?" demanded Laura. "I thought you were going to see the game between Lumberport and the East High team?"

"Why," said Chet, hesitating, looking at Lance, "if we tell you, you'll keep still about it – all you girls?"

"Of course," said Jess.

"All of you, I mean," said Chet, earnestly. "No passing it around with the usual platter of gossip on the athletic field this evening."

"How horrid of you, Chet!" cried Josephine Morse.

But Laura only laughed. "We can keep a secret as well as any crowd of boys – and he knows it," she said.

"Well," said her brother, squatting before the campfire, that was now burning briskly, and spreading out his jacket to the blaze, while the legs of his trousers began to steam. "Well, it's about Short and Long."

"Billy Long!" gasped Dorothy, looking at her sister.

"Poor Billy!" added Laura. "What about him?"

"He's missing," said Chet, gravely.

"Missing: The Short and Long of It, eh?" chuckled Jess.

"This is no laughing matter, Jess," declared Launcelot Darby, sharply. "Haven't you heard of the robbery?"

"At Stresch & Potter's department store?" cried Jess. "Of course. What's that got to do with Short and Long?"

"Nothing!" declared Chet, vigorously.

"Anybody who says that Billy Long helped in that robbery deserves to be kicked. He's not that kind of a fellow."

"But he's accused," said Laura, gravely.

"Somebody said they saw him hanging about the rear of the store with some men Tuesday afternoon. The men appeared to be surveyors. They are supposed to be the robbers, for nobody seems to know anything about them at the city engineer's office," Chet continued.

"A small boy had to be put through the little basement window where a screen was cut out. No man could have slipped through it and then opened that door for the men. Short and Long is accused – at least, he is suspected. A policeman went to his house Friday morning; but Billy had gone away over night."

"That looks suspicious," declared Jess.

"No, it doesn't. It looks as if Billy was scared – as of course he was," exclaimed Chet. "Who wouldn't be?"

"That is so," murmured one of the twins.

"Well," sighed Chet, "we heard that he had been seen to take a boat at Norman's Landing, and thought maybe he'd come over this way. So, as Purt wanted a sail –"

"And a bath, it seems," chuckled Jess.

"We came over this way, looking into the coves and inlets for the boat Billy is said to have borrowed. But we didn't see any sign of it, nor any sign of poor Billy. Of course he is innocent; but

he's scared, and his folks are poor, and Billy was afraid to remain at home, I suppose, thinking he would get his father into trouble, too."

"It's a mean shame," said Lance. "What if Stresch & Potter were robbed of ten thousand dollars? They oughtn't to have accused a perfectly innocent boy of helping in the robbery."

"But that's it!" exclaimed Laura. "How is Billy to disprove the accusation if he runs away and makes it appear that he is guilty?"

"Don't we see that?" demanded her brother. "That's what we want to get at Billy for. We want to catch and bring him back and make him face the music. Then we'll all prove him innocent and make these Smart Alecks take back what they've been saying about him. It's a shame!" cried Chet, again.

"It *is* a shame," agreed Laura.

But just then both the Lockwood twins burst out with:

"Maybe he *did* come over to the island."

"Huh! What for? To hide?" demanded Lance.

"Perhaps," said Dorothy.

"Maybe to find the robbers himself. Perhaps they are hiding here," said Dora.

"Likely," grunted Chet.

"We saw somebody hiding back yonder at the foot of Boulder Head," declared Dorothy.

"So we did! The lone pirate!" cried her sister.

"The lone pirate'?" repeated Laura and Jess, in unison. "Who's that?"

The twins told them what they had seen – the bewhiskered man who had hidden behind the boulder. But the boys scoffed at the idea of the stranger having anything to do with the men who robbed the department store safe, or anything to do with Billy Long.

"No," said Chet, wearily, "He's gone somewhere. But we don't know where. And if the police catch him it will go hard with poor Short and Long."

CHAPTER III

TONY ALLEGRETTO

Now, "Short and Long," as the boys called him (christened William Henry Harrison Long) was a jolly little fellow and extremely popular at Centerport's Central High School – not so much with the teachers and adults of his acquaintance, perhaps, as with his fellow pupils. He was full of fun and mischief; but to the boys who knew him to be perfectly fair and honest, the accusation now aimed against him seemed preposterous.

It was true that his father was a poor man, and Billy Long seldom had any spending money. Naturally he was always on the outlook for "odd jobs" which would earn him a little something for his own pocket. He had been seen carrying the chain for the mysterious surveyors who had been in the vacant lot behind the department store that was robbed the Tuesday night previous to the opening of our story; but *that* should not have made trouble for Short and Long. He did not let many such chances escape him when he was out of school.

Billy was the short-stop on the Central High nine and as Chetwood Belding and Lance Darby were important members of that team, too, they were naturally particularly interested in the missing youth.

The three boys who had so unceremoniously left the motor boat *Duchess* still stood around the hot fire on the shore, drying their garments. Purt Sweet was really a pitiful sight, his fancy clothing looking so much worse than that of his two companions. The girls were in gales of laughter over his plight.

Laura repeated in a sing-song voice:

"Double, double, toil and trouble,

Garments steam and Purt does bubble!"

"Now, Miss Laura," complained the victim, "This is altogether too serious a matter, I assure you, for laughter. What ever shall we do to get home?"

"Well, we can't walk," chuckled Lance.

"Guess we'll have to appear on the *Lady of the Lake*" said Chet.

"My goodness! In *this* state?" mourned Purt. "Only fawncy!"

"You can't fly home," said Jess. "Somebody is bound to see you."

"Let's take off our shoes, wring out our socks, and put 'em on again, and then walk over to the amusement park," said Chet.

"And if you girls will paddle over we'll treat you to ice cream," added Lance.

"You are trying to bribe us – I see," declared Laura, laughing again.

"Just so," said Lance. "We'll stand treat if you don't tell everybody how we had to jump out of Purt's old boat."

There was a good deal of laughter at this; but finally the four girls agreed and the boys helped them into the water again with their canoes. It was not far to the amusement park at the west end of Cavern Island, and the three partially dried boys arrived there about the time that the two canoes reached the landing.

There was a good deal of fun while the seven young folks were eating the cream. Purt Sweet slunk into his seat in the corner, striving to hide his bedraggled apparel. He tucked a paper napkin into the front of his waistcoat, and so hid the hideous color scheme of the gaudy shirt, the stripes of which had spread with wondrous rapidity. Then he buttoned his coat tightly to hide the ruined waistcoat; but the coat was tight anyway, and the ducking had done it no good.

"I believe, on my life, Purt," chuckled Chet, "that the coat is shrinking on you. That tailor cheated you this time – I know he did. If the coat gets much smaller, and you eat much more ice cream, you'll burst through the coat at all the seams like a full-blown cotton-blossom."

"Better let *me* eat the ice cream for you, old man," advised Lance, seriously. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself here."

"That's what I am," said Purt, sadly. "Fawncy meeting any of the Stricklands, or the Tarbot-Rushes, or General Maline's people, here when I'm in this condition. Weally, it is dweadful to contemplate."

"It's tough, I allow," said Chet callously. "What you need is a mask and a blanket to disguise yourself."

"You're not likely to meet any of Centerport's Four Hundred over here at Cavern Island Park," laughed Laura. "So you need not fear."

"I should think you would be just as ashamed presenting yourself before *us* as before those Maline girls," said Jess, tossing her head. "I am insulted. No! you cannot pay for my ice cream, Mr. Sweet. Chet will pay for it."

"Gee, Jess," chuckled Lance Darby. "If you eat more'n two dishes Chet will go broke. I know the state of his finances to-day. And Purt always has plenty of money."

"Weally, Miss Morse," urged Pretty, who was not usually prone to spend his money. "Weally, you must let me pay the check – for all. It is my treat, you know. And I assure you, I had no intention of saying anything to offend you."

"But you consider those Maline girls – and they are the homeliest girls in Centerport – of more importance than Laura and Dora and Dorothy and me. You're not ashamed to appear before us with your outfit all smudged up!"

"But, my dear Miss Morse!" gasped Pretty.

"Don't you 'dear' me, Mister!" ejaculated Jess, with every appearance of anger. "If I'm not as good as Sissy Maline –"

"Oh, you are! You are!" declared Purt, in haste. "You misunderstand. I am in this horrid state. But – you see – you saw it happen and realize that it was an unavoidable accident –"

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped Jess, still apparently unyielding. "If you hadn't tried to smoke a nasty cigarette –"

"Oh, I assure you it was a very mild one. I have them made extremely mild – and with my monogram on the paper. Weally, you know –"

"Horrid thing! You're the only boy who smokes them that we know. What do you say, girls? Sha'n't we cut Purt right off of our calling lists if he doesn't give up monogrammed cigarettes?"

"They're the worst kind," murmured Chet. "The monogram makes 'em so much more deadly."

"I tried one of Purt's coffin nails once – ugh!" admitted Lance. "He calls 'em mild. But he's so saturated with nicotine that he doesn't know what 'mild' means. I believe they make his cigarettes out of rope-yarn and distilled opium. One puff made me ill all day."

"Impossible, dear boy!" gasped Purt.

"I believe it's as Lance says," said Laura, gravely. "And Purt sets a very bad example for the other boys."

"Sure!" grinned her brother. "We're all likely to run off and send for a thousand monogrammed cigarettes."

"What! what!" cried Jess. "Did Purt buy a *thousand*?"

"I – I had to, Miss Josephine, to get the monogram printed on the wrapper, you know."

"Come," said Laura, still with a serious air. "We must decide what is to be done with this culprit, girls."

"I think he should not be allowed to associate with any of the girls of Central High," said one of the twins.

"Or with the boys, either," suggested Lance.

"His example *is* dreadfully bad," said Jess.

"Weally! I assure you – " panted Purt, wriggling all over, and not quite sure whether the girls meant it, or were "rigging" him.

"Have you any more of those nasty cigarettes with you?" demanded Laura, sternly.

Purt, looking greatly abashed, hauled out a saturated case of seal leather and displayed nine of the pulpy looking things.

"So you only smoked one of them to-day?" was the next demand.

"And he only just got that lit when the vapor from the gasoline caught fire. Like to have burned him to death," grunted Chet.

"That single smoke was certainly a very expensive one for you, Master Purt," declared Laura. "For perhaps it has cost you your motor-boat At least, it has cost you more than the whole thousand cigarettes were worth. Kindly throw those disreputable looking things away!"

Purt obeyed instantly by tossing case and all into the lake.

"Ugh! now you'll poison the fish," complained Jess.

"Never mind the fish," said Laura, still intent upon the victim. "Now, Purt, how many cigarettes have you left at home?"

"Oh – I – ah – "

"Do not prevaricate!" commanded the girl. "Answer at once."

"Why – I – I have most of the thousand left," admitted Purt.

"Say! you always carry around a full case to flash on the fellows – I see you," cried Lance.

"Ye – es," admitted Purt.

"Tell the truth, sir! How many of the horrid things have you left at home?"

Purt looked up at her, blinked a couple of times, swallowed like a toad that has snapped up a live coal, and then blurted out:

"Nine hundred and ninety!"

At that a howl of laughter went up from the crowd.

"And – and you – you've nev – never smoked even *one*?" gasped Laura, at last.

"Not until to-day," replied the sadly abashed Purt.

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" cried Lance. "And he's had those cigarettes for three months, I know!"

"Purt, you'll be the death of us yet," declared Chet Belding, wiping his eyes.

"I – I couldn't get used to the taste of them in my mouth," confessed the dude.

"You're more fun than a box of monkeys!" declared Lance.

"That reminds me, girls," said Chet, suddenly, and picking up the checks to pay the bill before Purt Sweet could get around to it. "There's an enormously funny monkey over here. Trained to a hair. I saw him over in Centerport when his owner brought him through – "

"I saw that monkey – with a piano organ. And such a nice looking Italian with it," declared Laura.

"Look out, Lance," whispered Chet, grinning, "she likes the romantic and dark complexioned style in heroes. Get some walnut stain and a black wig."

"Why, he was playing in the streets, over in town," said Jess.

"That was just to advertise his act before the season opened," declared Chet. "So he told me."

"All right," Laura said. "The boat isn't due yet, so we might as well remain with you boys until it comes and so keep you out of mischief."

"But I really look so badly – " began Purt.

"Never mind. You won't meet the Maline girls here," snapped Jess, as though she were still very angry with him.

"Come on, Purt – be a sport," whispered Lance, with a wicked grin. "It won't cost you anything except what you give to the monkey – and that's a private affair between you and the monk you know."

It was true that Sweet was a "tight-wad," as the boys expressed it. He would spend any amount of money on himself, or to make a show; but liberality was not one of his virtues.

The young folks were not long in finding the booth, across which was painted a straggling sign reading:

TONY ALLEGRETTO AND HIS
PERFORMING MONKEY

"Which is the 'monk'?" demanded Lance, in a whisper, when they saw two very gaily dressed figures on the tiny platform before the booth.

The Italian himself was a short, agile young man, but not ill-looking. He had splendid teeth, and they showed white and even behind his smile, for his face was dusky and his mustache as black as jet, as was his hair. He was dressed in a gay, if soiled, Neapolitan costume, and the monkey was dressed in an imitation of his master's get-up. It was a large monkey, with a long tail and a solemn face, not at all the ordinary kind of monkey that appears with organ grinders.

The Italian began to grind his organ when he saw the accession of the young folk from Central High to his crowd of spectators. They made a goodly audience and Tony Allegretto – if that was his name – began his open-air performance.

"Aria from 'Cavalleria Rusticana' to inaugurate the performance of a monkey," chuckled Jess. "How are the mighty fallen!"

Suddenly Tony changed the tune and spoke a sharp word in Italian to the monkey. Instantly the creature went to the front of the platform, took off his cap, bowed to the audience with hand and cap upon his heart, and then began to dance.

It was a rather melancholy dance, but he turned and twisted, while Tony scolded and threatened in a low voice.

"Gee!" exclaimed Lance. "That's the monkey that put the 'tang' in 'tango' – eh, what?"

"Poor little thing!" said the Lockwood twins together.

"I don't believe he likes to do that," said Laura.

"He ought to be taken away from that man and sent to school," declared Chet, with gravity in his face but a twinkle in his eye.

"He'd do quite as well in his classes as some of you boys, I have no doubt," said Jess, quickly. "At least, Professor Dimp says you act like a lot of monkeys sometimes."

"Old Dimple is prejudiced," declared Lance. "He ought to see *this* monkey act. Phew! see him whirl. There! that's over. Now what next?"

CHAPTER IV

A SOLEMN MOMENT

The dance of the performing monkey had ceased and its owner changed the tune on the piano-organ again. He handed the monkey a little toy gun with one hand while he still turned the crank with the other. The monkey threw the gun down petulantly at first, but Tony threatened him and finally the animal held it when it was thrust into his hands.

"That monk certainly does understand Italian," admitted Lance. "I bet they are related."

"Lance is 'sore' on the Italian because he thinks Laura admires Tony," chuckled Chet.

"Be still!" commanded Laura. "You had better be nice to us girls or we won't keep the secret of how you boys took an involuntary bath to-day."

"Nuff said," growled Chet. "I'm dumb."

The monkey was changing the gun from hand to shoulder, and holding it in different positions supposedly in imitation of a soldier's drill. But some of the audience laughed at its awkwardness.

"The Italian army must drill differently from ours," said Dora Lockwood.

"Did you ever see anything so funny?" laughed her twin.

Tony overheard them and his eyes flashed. He boxed the poor monkey on the side of the head, and it ran chattering to the end of its line.

"Aw, say!" exclaimed the good natured Lance. "Isn't that mean?"

"It's not a very smart monkey at that," said a man in the crowd.

"Hi!" exclaimed Tony, suddenly, "you think-a da monk can't do anything? He don't lik-a da silly treak – eh? Look now! I lock de door – so," and suiting his action to his words the Italian turned the big brass key in the lock of the booth door. He shook the door to show that it was fastened. Then he turned to the monkey again. "Bébé!" he commanded, harshly, pointing to the door, and rattled off some command in his own language which the audience did not understand. But the monkey seemed to understand it.

He looked at his master, ran to the end of his line, looked back at Tony, chattered, and then seized the big key. He turned it carefully, still looking over his shoulder at Tony, who appeared not to notice him, and ground the organ furiously.

The lock must have been well oiled, for the monkey turned the key very easily. Then he turned the knob of the door quite as carefully, all the time appearing to be afraid that he would be caught at it. For the first time the monkey actually betrayed some ability as an actor.

He pushed open the door, still keeping a sharp watch upon his master. Slowly he wedged his way into the booth. In a moment he had snatched something from the table inside and was back again upon the platform, with his mouth full, and munching rapidly, with his face hidden from his master.

The crowd laughed and applauded. Tony considered this a good time to take up the collection and he gave the monkey his cup. The little fellow made a polite bow to every person who dropped anything into the cup. At those who did not contribute Bébé chattered angrily.

"He's just as cunning as he can be," said Dorothy, as they turned away. "But I don't believe that man treats the monkey kindly."

"Here comes the boat!" exclaimed Chet. "We've got to leave you, girls. Don't get into any trouble, now, paddling home."

"Don't you fear for us," returned Dora, confidently.

"Let's race back to Centerport!" proposed Jess.

"No," said Laura, as the girls tripped down to the landing where they had left their canoes. "It is too far and Mrs. Case warns us not to over-exert, paddling."

"She's a fuss-budget," declared Jess, pouting.

"She's the best physical instructor in Centerport, and we're lucky to have her at Central High," said Dorothy, loyally.

"We're supposed to be in training for the boat races, too," said Dora.

The girls got aboard nicely and started across the lake. It was a calm day and there were scarcely any ripples; therefore there was little likelihood of the girls getting into any trouble. Half way across they saw a second motor-boat towing the burned *Duchess* toward the city. The fire was out, but the girls saw that poor Purt would have to spend some of his money in repairing the craft.

The four girls reached the school boathouse and had their canoes drawn out and put carefully away. Then they separated, for the Lockwood twins did not live on the same street as Laura and her chum.

The Lockwood cottage was set in a rather large plot of ground, which was mostly given up to Mr. Lockwood's nursery and hot-houses. The twins' father was wrapped up in his horticultural experiments, and as they had no mother the two girls were left much to their own devices. Mrs. Betsey Spink kept house for the Lockwoods, and had been the twins' nurse when they were little. She was a gentle, unassuming old lady, who "mothered" the girls as best she knew how, and shielded absent-minded Mr. Lockwood from all domestic troubles. The neighbors declared that the Lockwood household would have been a very shiftless establishment had it not been for Mrs. Betsey.

Mr. Lockwood seldom knew how the bills were paid, what the girls wore, or how the house was run. His mind was given wholly to inventing new forms of plant life. He experimented with white blackberries, thornless roses, dwarf trees that bore several kinds of fruit on different limbs, and, of late, had tried to cultivate a seedless watermelon. He was always expecting to make a fortune out of some of his novel experiments; but as yet the fortune had not materialized.

But he was a most lovable gentleman, and the twins were as proud of him as though he was the most successful man in Centerport. Mr. Lockwood had one cross to bear, however – a thorn in the flesh which troubled him on occasion very much. This was a certain very practical sister – the twins' Aunt Dora. Fortunately Aunt Dora lived in another city; but she was apt to make unexpected visits to her brother, and when she came to the Lockwood house there was no peace for any of the inmates while she stayed.

As the twins on this occasion entered the premises by the back gate they saw certain windows on the second floor of the house wide open, and the curtains drawn back. They halted in something more than astonishment, and looked at each other solemnly.

"That's Aunt Dora's room!" gasped Dora.

"She's here!" returned Dorothy, in the same awe-struck voice.

"Oh, dear!" sighed her twin.

"Now we're in for it," rejoined Dorothy.

Then both together they exclaimed: "Poor papa!"

It was a solemn moment for the whole household, and the twins felt it.

CHAPTER V

AUNT DORA

"I feel just like running away," said Dora, "and staying until Auntie goes."

"Don't do it," begged Dorothy, "for I shall have to go, too."

"Poor papa!" they both exclaimed again.

"No. We shall have to stay and brace papa up," admitted Dora.

"We've just *got* to," groaned her twin.

"And if she begins to nag him again about giving one of us up – "

"We won't leave him," declared Dorothy, very firmly.

"I wouldn't live at her house for a fortune!" repeated Dorothy.

"Come on! let's see how the land lies," suggested Dora. "Perhaps the worst of it's over."

"No such luck," groaned Dorothy. "There's Betsey."

They ran up the winding path to the kitchen porch. The gentle, pink-faced old lady who met them at the door, had a worried brow.

"Hush, girls! you're aunt is here," she whispered.

"We know it. We saw the windows of the best room wide open. Is she making Mary clean the room all over again?"

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Betsey. "Your aunt declared it smelled musty from being shut up. She has *such* a nose," and the little old lady shook her head.

"Interfering old thing!" snapped Dora.

"Hush! you must not speak so," admonished Mrs. Betsey.

"Well, she *is*," declared Dorothy, of course agreeing with her twin.

"Where is she?" queried Dora.

"With your father in the hot-house."

"Come on, then," said Dora to her sister. "Let's get it over right away."

They heard voices in the conservatory, for the sashes were open on this warm day. There was the stern, uncompromising tone of Aunt Dora, and the gentle, worried voice of Mr. Lockwood. The twins never liked to hear their father's voice when he was worried, and they saw to it – with Mrs. Betsey – that it did not occur frequently. But there was no help for it when Aunt Dora was about!

First of all, the twins heard their aunt say:

"You're no more fit to bring up girls, Lemuel, than I am to steer one of these dratted airships the papers are full of!"

"No. You are right," said Mr. Lockwood. "The comparison is just. You would *not* do well in an airship, Dora."

"Huh! I should think not! And you're as little fit to bring up two girls – and twins, at that!"

"But – but I don't really bring them up," said Mr. Lockwood, apologetically. "Mrs. Betsey does that."

"Mrs. Betsey!" with a sniff.

"And really, they get along very well, Sister."

"They get along well because they are no trouble to you."

"Well, isn't that as it should be? They are good girls – and loving girls."

"I declare to man! Lemuel Lockwood, you haven't any more idea of what those girls need than a babe unborn."

"What *do* they need, Dora?" asked worried Mr. Lockwood.

"They need a strong hand – a stern and uncompromising spirit to govern them – that's what they need!" declared the militant aunt.

"But Dora, they are good girls and make me no trouble at all."

"Of course they make you no trouble. You let them do exactly as they wish."

"No, no!" urged Mr. Lockwood, hastily. "They don't always do as they wish. Sometimes we haven't the money to let them do *with*. I've heard Mrs. Betsey say so. And – and – why, there is one of them who likes three lumps of sugar in her coffee; but I always reprove her for it. That is extravagance."

"Huh!" sniffed Aunt Dora.

"Otherwise they are no trouble to me at all," said Mr. Lockwood, briskly. "They are not, I assure you. We live a very quiet and peaceful life here."

"Yah!" exclaimed his sister. "That is all you want – peace."

"I admit it – I admit it," returned her brother. "I am naturally retiring and of a peaceful disposition, Dora."

"You're a natural born fool, Lemuel!" declared his sister, so sharply that the twins, who were inadvertently listening at the door, hesitating to go in, fairly jumped. "I want to tell you right now that you are a disgrace to manhood! You've never amounted to a row of beans since you were out of pinafores. If your little property wasn't tied up hard and fast so that you could only use the income of it, you would have frittered it all away long ago, and left these children penniless. You've never made a dollar in your life, Lemuel Lockwood!"

"But – but there has never been any real necessity for me to make money," stammered the horticulturist. "And one of these days we are going to have a plenty. I've got a melon started here on the bench, Dora –"

"You needn't show me any of your nasty plants. They're all ridiculous. And it isn't plants we're talking about. It's girls. Mercy knows how an inscrutable Providence ever came to allow two helpless girl babies to fall into your hands, Lemuel. But they're here and you've the burden of them. One would be more than you could manage properly; but two is ridiculous. I'd undertake, as I have told you before, to bring my namesake up as a girl *should* be brought up – and that will leave more money for you to fritter away on your hot-beds and cold-frames, and the like," she added, slyly.

"Dora!" exclaimed Mr. Lockwood, with a quaver in his voice, "do you really think I am not doing my duty by Dora and Dorothy?"

"Think it?" sniffed his sister. "I know it! And everybody else with sense knows it. How can a mere man bring up twin girls and give them a proper start in life?"

"But Mrs. Betsey does her very best –"

"And what does *she* know?" demanded his sister. "Does she ever read papers upon the proper management of girls? Or magazine articles upon what a young girl should be taught by her parents? Or books upon the growth and development of the girlish mind?"

"No – o," admitted Mr. Lockwood. "I am very sure Mrs. Betsey never has time for such reading."

"Then what does she know about it?" demanded Aunt Dora, triumphantly.

"But they are hardly ever sick – and how pretty they both are!" sighed the father of the twins.

"Bah! never sick! pretty!" ejaculated Aunt Dora, staccato. "What about their souls, Lemuel Lockwood? What about the development of their minds? Have you done aught to make them stern and uncompromising when they meet the world on an equal footing – as all women shall in the time to come? Are you preparing them for their work in life? Are they prepared to take the helm of affairs and show Man how Woman can guide affairs of moment?"

"I – I hope not!" murmured Mr. Lockwood, aghast. "They are just girls going to school, and studying, and having fun, and loving each other. No, Dora, the stern duties of life have not troubled them as yet, thank God!"

"But they should be beginning to realize them, Lemuel," declared his sister. "Life is not fun. There is no time to dawdle around with plays, and athletics, and such foolishness. Where are they this minute, Lemuel Lockwood?"

"Why – why, they went out on the lake."

"In what?"

"A canoe, I understand."

"And what's a canoe?" gasped Aunt Dora. "Is *that* a proper thing for young girls to ride in? Why! it's a savage boat – an Indian boat. A canoe, indeed!"

"But I scarcely can think there is any harm in their paddling a canoe. Many of their schoolmates do so, and their physical instructor, Mrs. Case, approves."

"It is no business for my namesake to be in," declared Aunt Dora. "You named her after me, Lemuel, and I feel that I have some right to her. She having no mother, and I being her godmother, she is more mine than anybody else's. And I am determined to take her home with me."

"Take Dora?" gasped Mr. Lockwood. "Whatever should we do without her?"

"Hah!" exclaimed his sister. "You have the other one."

"But – but it doesn't seem as though one would be complete without the other," said Mr. Lockwood, thoughtfully. "They have always been together. Why, nobody knows them apart – "

"And that's another foolish thing!" exclaimed Aunt Dora. "To allow two girls to reach their age and have nobody able to distinguish between them. Dressing them just alike, and all! It is ridiculous."

"But they have always wished to be just alike, Sister," said the father of the twins.

"*They* wished!" exclaimed Aunt Dora. "Is it *their* place to have their way in such affairs? That is exactly what I say, Lemuel – you're not fit to manage the girls. And I am determined to save one of them from the results of your mismanagement. I have always noticed," added Aunt Dora, a little less confidently, "that Dora is much more amenable in disposition than Dorothy. Naturally, being named after me, she may have taken on more reasonable and practical characteristics than her sister."

Mr. Lockwood was a thin little man, with wisps of gray hair over his ears, a bald crown, on which he always wore a skullcap, and meek side whiskers. But now he stood and stared in perfect amazement at his sister, demanding:

"Do you mean to tell me you have noticed such characteristics in Dora?"

"Certainly," said his sister, complacently.

"Then you know them apart?"

"Well – er – when I have the opportunity of comparing their manner and speech – "

"Here they are!" exclaimed the harassed father, suddenly spying the girls behind his sister. "If you can tell which is which, you are welcome to. I leave it to the girls themselves. If Dora wishes to go with you, she may. I – I wash my hands of the affair!"

CHAPTER VI

WHICH IS WHICH?

Mr. Lockwood had a habit of getting out of difficulties in this way. He frequently "washed his hands" of affairs, finding that they adjusted themselves somehow without his aid, after all.

But on this present occasion there was, perhaps, a special reason why he should tell his sister to go ahead, and leave the matter entirely with her and the twins themselves. Aunt Dora claimed to be able to tell the girls apart – something that nobody, not even Mrs. Betsey, had been able to do since they were little tots and Dora had worn a blue ribbon on her wrist, and Dorothy a pink.

The twins, who had heard all the foregoing conversation, and understood the situation thoroughly, advanced when their Aunt Dora turned to meet them.

"Kiss me, my dears," commanded the militant lady, opening her arms. "Dora, first!"

But the twins ran in together and one kissed her on one cheek while the other placed her salute on the other – and at exactly the same moment. Aunt Dora adjusted her eyeglasses, stood off a yard or so, and stared at the girls.

"Dora," she said, solemnly, "you are going home with me."

Neither girls changed color, or showed in the least that the announcement was either a pleasant one, or vice versa.

"Do you hear?" demanded their aunt.

"Yes, ma'am," they replied, in chorus.

"I spoke to Dora," said the lady, firmly.

Not a word said the twins.

"Which is which, Dora?" asked Mr. Lockwood, from the background, and perhaps enjoying his sister's discomfiture. "I declare nobody in *this* house has been able to tell them apart since they were in their crib. Mrs. Betsey declares she believes they used to exchange ribbons when they were toddlers, for she used to find the bows tied in funny knots."

The two girls looked at each other with dancing eyes, but said nothing. It had been their sport all their lives to mystify people about their several identities. And here was a situation in which they determined – both of them – to keep their aunt guessing.

"This is no matter for flippancy," said Aunt Dora, sternly. "I intend to take my namesake home with me, and to bring her up, educate her, and finally share my fortune with her. Do you understand this fully?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the twins.

"I am speaking to Dora," their aunt said tartly.

The girls were silent.

"I am separating Dora from her sister for her own good. As you girls grow older you will find that the income your father has remaining will barely support one girl in a proper manner. To divide his responsibility is a kindness to him – "

"That is not so," interjected the mild Mr. Lockwood. "You are more than welcome, girls, to all I have. And – possibly – I might look about and get a little more money for you to use, as time goes on. If you need it – "

"We know all about it, Papa," chimed the twins. "We are satisfied."

"Does that mean you are satisfied to remain here, Dora?" demanded their aunt, insisting upon speaking as though but one girl heard her.

"We are both satisfied," chorused the twins, quickly.

"But I am *not* satisfied with the affair," declared Aunt Dora. "It has long been both my intention and desire to take my namesake – my godchild – away from here. While you two girls were small it was all very well to declare it cruel to separate you. But you are old enough now – "

"We shall never be old enough, Auntie, to wish to be separated," said one of the twins.

"Nonsense, child!" exclaimed Aunt Dora, her eyes sparkling as she thought she had at last obtained an inkling to the identity of the two girls. "You will soon get over all that, Dora – of course you will."

"I am sure I should not so soon get over separation from my sister," said the other girl.

Her aunt wheeled on this one. "Do you mean to tell me that you scorn my offer?"

"If I were Dora I should beg to be excused," returned the niece to whom she had spoken.

Aunt Dora whirled again and transfixed the other with decided satisfaction and a sparkling eye.

"But Dora, I feel sure, will go with her aunt gladly," cried the lady.

"If I were Dora I should beg to be excused," repeated the girl at whom she looked, in exactly the same tone, and with an unmoved countenance, too.

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