

Penrose Margaret

Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School



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CHAPTER I TWO YOUNG GIRLS

"And you are quite sure, daddy, I am not dreaming? That I am sitting right here with my arms around your neck, and you have just told me it is all perfectly true?" And, to make still more certain that the whole matter was one of unquestionable reality, the girl gave her parent such a flesh and blood hug that a physical answer came to her question in the shape of a protest from the very wideawake man.

"Now, see here, Little Captain," he remarked, "it is all very well to make sure we are not dreaming, and that all the good news is real, but please remember I have put on a clean collar and – your tactics are quite military. You are acquiring muscle."

Major Dale kissed his daughter fondly as she relinquished her hold on him, and smoothed back a stray lock of his silvery hair.

"I'm so glad for you, daddy," she went on. "You do so need a real rest, and now we will not have to plan every day what we may spend to-morrow. I fancy I will still keep the note-book going with pounds and prices of things, and an occasional orange, and even some foreign fruit now and then. Dear me! I feel the good of that money already. We can have so many luxuries – no more scrimping and patching –"

"But, daughter dear," interrupted the major, "you must not imagine that mere money can bring happiness. It depends entirely upon the proper use of that commodity – we must always exercise good judgment, whether one dollar or one hundred dollars are involved."

"Oh, of course, I know we are not so very rich, we cannot just exactly live sumptuously, but we may live comfortably. And really, daddy, now that it is over, I may as well own up, I have longed with the longest kind of longing for a brand-new hat. May I really have one? Ribbons and all?"

"Two, one for Sunday and one for every day," promptly responded the major, laughing. "But your hats always look new –"

"They do say I have talent for hats, and that one must have originality to trim and keep old head-gear up to date. So, daddy dear, perhaps, some day, that hint of talent may develop – I may be an artist or something. Then I will bless the days when I had to make over hats to discover myself," and Dorothy promptly clapped upon her blond head such a confusion of straw and flowers, to say nothing of the dangling blue ribbons, that even the major, with his limited appreciation of "keeping old head-gear up-to-date" was forced to acknowledge that his daughter did know how to trim a hat.

"When will the money come?" she asked, tilting her head to one side to get a look in the small oval mirror, that was sufficiently large for the major's neckties, but was plainly too short for hats.

"We won't get it by the pound, like butter, you know, daughter. Nor is it a matter of so many blank checks to be filled out as we progress with penmanship – like copy-book work. As a matter of fact, I have just received the legal information that my dear old soldier uncle Ned – otherwise known as Captain Edward Dale on the retired list, resident of India, subject of Great Britain, has answered the last roll call – and left what he had to me. Uncle Ned was the hero of our family, daughter dear, and some day I will tell you why you are my Little Captain – his own successor," and the major laid his hand upon Dorothy's shoulder in a way he had of making a promise that he intended to keep.

A commotion on the side porch interrupted their confidences, and the major took advantage of it to make his escape. He kissed Dorothy good-bye, and left her to the "commotion" that presently made its way in at the door in the shape of Tavia Travers, Dorothy's warmest friend in every thing.

"Hurrah for the good news!" shouted Tavia, flinging her sailor hat up to the ceiling and catching it as promptly.

"Three cheers for the money,
When will it come?
Give a feller some
Tiddle-umtum-tum
I have to say bunny,
To make a rhyme with money!"

And Tavia swung around like a pin-wheel to bring her "verse" to an effective full stop – a way she had of punctuating her impromptu productions.

Dorothy made a comical "squat" to add more finish, and then the two girls, feeling better for having opened the safety valve of physical exertion to "let off" mental exuberance, sat down to talk it over quietly.

"Are you perfectly positive, certain, sure, that it's just you, Dorothy Dale, and no fairy or mermaid," began Tavia, settling herself among the cushions on Major Dale's sofa. "Of all the delicious, delectable things! To have a rich, old uncle die 'way off in India, where you don't even have to make your nose red at his funeral. And to leave you a million dollars –"

"Oh, not quite a million," interrupted Dorothy. "Something considerable less than that, I believe."

"But it's all kinds of money I know," went on the other. "Dear me! I do wish some kind of money would run in our family even with red noses thrown in. But no such luck! When we have a funeral we always have to pay for the coach."

"Tavia Travers! How dare you talk so, of such serious things!"

"How else would you have me talk of serious things? The most serious thing in my life is money – its scarcity. Funerals, of course, take time, and are unpleasant in many respects, but, for right at home trouble, it's money."

"It is nice to think that the dear old captain should be so good to father," said Dorothy. "Father was always his favorite relative, and he particularly liked him on account of his military honors."

"Well, he ought to, of course," put in Tavia, "for your father keeps the name Dale up for military honors. But what in the world are you going to do with all the money? Don't, for goodness' sake, go away for your health, and other things, and leave poor me to die here without nobody nor nuthin'," and the girl burst into make-believe tears.

"Indeed," said Dorothy. "We can enjoy the good fortune in no place better than in dear old Dalton, and among our own good friends," and she put her arms affectionately about Tavia. "But one thing has been definitely decided upon –"

"You are going to buy the Harvy mansion?"

"No, a new hat. Father has just this minute given his consent."

"Make it a tiara and save the expense of hat-pins," suggested Tavia.

"No, I have a hankering for a Gainsborough, the kind the lady hanging over Aunt Winnie's stairs wears – the picture queen, you know."

"Oh, yes, she looks very nice in a picture over the stairs," remarked Tavia, "but my advice to you would be to wear elastic under your chin with a thing like that – or else try Gulliver's Glue. One breeze of the Dalton kind would be enough for a Gainsborough."

"You shall help me pick it out," agreed Dorothy. "In the meantime don't sit on the only one I have. I just left it on the sofa as you came in – "

"And if it isn't the dearest, sweetest thing now," exclaimed Tavia, rescuing the mass of perishables she had unwittingly pressed into something like a funeral piece.

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I did like that hat!"

"And so did I!" declared Tavia. "That hat was a stunner, and I deeply regret it's untimely taking away – it went to pieces without a groan. That comes of having a real Leghorn. I could sit all over my poor straw pancake and it would not as much as bend – couldn't. It would have no place to bend to."

"You could never wear anything that would become you more than a simple sailor," said Dorothy, with the air of one in authority, "and if I had your short locks I would just sport a jaunty little felt sailor all summer. But with my head – "

"Jaunty doesn't go. I quite agree with you, picture lady, your head is cut out for picture hats. Another positive evidence of money running in your family – my head was cut out for an economical pattern – lucky thing for me!" and Tavia clapped her aforesaid sailor on her bronze head at a decidedly rakish angle, while Dorothy busied herself with a thorough investigation of the wreck of her own headpiece.

As told in "Dorothy Dale: A Girl of To-Day," the first book of this series, these two girls, Dorothy Dale and Octavia Travers, were school friends, home friends and all kinds of friends, both about the same age, and both living in a little interesting town called Dalton, in New York state. Dorothy was the daughter of Major Dale, a prominent citizen of the place, while Tavia's father was Squire Travers, a man who was largely indebted to Dorothy for the office he held, inasmuch as she had managed, in a girl's way, to bring about his election.

Tavia had a brother Johnnie, quite an ordinary boy, while Dorothy had two brothers, Joe, aged nine and Roger, aged seven years.

There was one other member of the Dale household, Mrs. Martin, the housekeeper, who had cared for the children since their mother had been called away. She was that sort of responsible aged woman who seems to grow more and more particular with years, and perhaps her only fault, if it might be termed such, was her excessive care of Roger – her baby, she insisted, – for to her his seven years by no means constituted a length of time sufficient to make a boy of him. The children called Mrs. Martin, Aunt Libby, and to them she was indeed as kind and loving as any aunt could be.

Dorothy had an aunt, Mrs. Winthrop White, of North Birchland in summer, and of the city in winter, a woman of social importance, as well as being a most lovable and charming lady personally. A visit of Dorothy and Tavia to the Cedars, Mrs. White's country place, as related in "Dorothy Dale," was full of incidents, and in the present volume we shall become still better acquainted with the family, which included Mrs. White's two sons, Ned and Nat, both young men well worth knowing.

Dorothy and Tavia might well rejoice in the good news that the major had so lately been informed of, for the acquirement of means to Dorothy would undoubtedly bring good times to Tavia, and both deserved the prospects of sunshine and laughter, for alas – in all lives, even those scarcely old enough to take upon their shoulders the burden of cares, there comes some blot to mar the page: some speck to break the glorious blue of the noonday sky.

Dorothy Dale was not without her sorrow. A wicked man, Andrew Anderson by name, had come into her life in a mysterious way. Dorothy had befriended, and in her own way, helped back to a day of happiness an unfortunate man, Miles Burlock. This man had for years been in the strange power of Anderson, but before it was too late Dorothy had helped Burlock break the chains of strong drink that seemed to have bound him to the evil companion, and for this interference she had suffered – she was now the object of Anderson's hatred. Anderson was after the money that Miles Burlock had to leave at his death, but Dorothy and her father saved this for its rightful owner, a little daughter of Miles Burlock, who had for some years been kept away from her own father by Anderson.

The child, now an orphan, came into the care of Major Dale, her legal guardian and so Anderson had new cause for his hatred for Dorothy – the money and child having both been put out of his reach. So this was Dorothy's sorrow: she had been persecuted because of her goodness.

No one who knew Tavia Travers would have considered her capable of worry. She was as light-hearted as air, with a great faculty for mischief and a "hankering" for fun. But she did have a worry, a fear that some day Dorothy Dale might pass out of her life and end the attachment that came in childhood and waxed strong with girlhood. Dorothy was what might be considered a girl of the aristocratic class, while Tavia belonged to those who consider it a privilege to work for a living and have a keen appreciation of the opportunity – as Squire Travers proved when he turned in to show himself the best official, in the capacity of squire, of which Dalton ever boasted.

Now a new danger threatened Tavia: Dorothy would be almost rich. Would that help to break the ties of love and friendship between the girls?

Not that Dorothy could ever change in her sincere love for Tavia, but might not circumstances separate them, and then – ?

Tavia had been first to congratulate Dorothy on the good news and the smashed hat had furnished an incident sufficiently distracting to keep Tavia from the lamentations that at first filled her heart. Hence it has been necessary to take the reader through her sentiments in a very much less interesting way than Tavia herself would have disclosed them. She had a way of saying and doing things that was inimitable, and amusing, if not entirely elevating.

"Then you think you will stay in Dalton?" asked Tavia, finally, as Dorothy succeeded in pulling the smashed hat back into some kind of shape, if not the right kind.

"Why not?" asked Dorothy. "Are there not plenty of good people in Dalton?"

"Oh, a few, perhaps. There's me and Johnnie – but we are not 'out' yet, and you will be looking for society friends. Well, here's good luck to you with your Indian millions, and don't forget that in your poorest days I used to lend you chewing gum," and at this Tavia threw her arms around Dorothy in a warm embrace, as if striving to hold to her heart and keep in her life the same old darling Dorothy – in spite of the new circumstances.

"Say, Sis!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Do you realize that this is the very day you are to go for an automobile ride with Nat White?"

"And that you are to go in the same machine with Ned White? Course I do, you selfish girl. So taken up with common money that you never noticed my get-up. Look at this," and Tavia drew from the folds of her skirt a cloud of something. "Automobile veil," she explained, giving the flimsy stuff a turn that sent it floating through the air like a cloud of smoke.

"Splendid!" declared Dorothy.

"Glorious!" remarked Tavia, "the real thing. I found it in an old trunk among dear old grandma Travers' things, and grandma loved it dearly. I persuaded mother to let me inherit it, and smell," putting the gray cloud of silk to Dorothy's face, "that perfume is lavender. Grandma always used it."

"What a dear old lady she must have been," said Dorothy, looking over the dainty article critically. "You are not really going to wear it," she faltered, realizing the value of such an heirloom.

"No, I am not, but – you are! There, Doro, darling, it is a gift for you from – me. You will always keep it and – love it –"

"Indeed I will do no such thing as to take your dear grandma's things. You must always keep this yourself –"

"But I want you to, Doro. It will make me happy to know I have given you something good – something I have loved, and something you will love for me. There," and she put the scarf over Dorothy's blond head, "you look like an angel. Grandma herself will be proud all the way from heaven, to see this fall upon the shoulders of one so worthy in face and in heart," and the two stood there

clasped in each other's arms, the silvery veil of love falling about the shoulders of both, and binding "all the way to heaven," in its folds of sweetest lavender the hearts of two young girls.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRE BIRD

Outside sounded the strident "honk-honk" of an automobile horn, followed by a series of explosions, like a Gatling gun in full operation, as Ned cut out the muffler, threw off the clutch, and brought the machine to a stop at the door. More "honk-honks" called Dorothy out to welcome her cousins, and presently Ned and Nat, and Dorothy and Tavia were chatting merrily on the porch, as the big machine puffed and "gasped" after its long run from North Birchland to Dalton.

"We will go right off," insisted Dorothy, "so as to get all the ride we can, it is such a beautiful day. I only have to grab up the lunch basket, and Tavia is all ready – has been waiting in fact," as Tavia readjusted her "sailor," and endeavored to look spick and span, as she had looked before the series of embraces and other disturbing activities upset her rather perishable toilette – nothing wrinkles like freshly-ironed gingham.

"Just a drink of cold water, lady," begged Ned, "before we start again. My throat is macadamized, my eyes are veritable kaleidoscopes, and I feel like a mummy generally."

"Why, of course," apologized Dorothy, "you must want a rest after that long dusty ride. Come into the sitting room, and we will try to refresh you."

"Just plain water, please," insisted Ned, "and then we will start off."

Tavia lost no time in bringing a pail of fresh water – Nat doing the bringing, while Tavia smiled approval and encouragement; it is a matter of such importance to carry the pail just so, when one really wants a perfectly fresh drink and not a glass of bubbles, and Nat was seemingly so anxious to learn all about well water – all that Tavia could tell him.

"Come on," called Ned, impatiently from the side window. "We want the water in time to get away before nightfall. Must be lovely to go fishing for water in a pail like Simple Simon. Nat, you can talk to Tavia indefinitely after we have slaked our 'Fire-Bird' thirst."

Tavia blushed prettily at the good-natured rebuke, and Dorothy playfully shook her finger at the tardy one, who seemed to have forgotten all about Ned wishing a drink.

Finally the boys were satisfied that Dalton wells did justice to their reputation, and so the "Fire-Bird" was made ready for the day's run.

"I am so glad," commented Dorothy, "that Joe and Roger are not around, it would be hard to go off and leave them."

"Plenty of time for little boys," remarked Nat, turning on the gasoline, then shoving the spark lever over, all ready to crank up.

Tavia had taken her place in front, as Nat was to drive the car, while Dorothy was on the leather cushions in the tonneau, where Ned would interest her with talk of school and other topics which the two cousins held in common.

Presently Nat cranked up, swung himself into the car and the Fire-Bird "grunted off" lazy enough at first, but soon increasing to a swift run through the streets of Dalton.

"Isn't it splendid!" Tavia could not refrain from exclaiming enthusiastically.

"Yes," answered Nat, "but I believe there is something in swift motion that unbalances human equilibrium. The madness of motoring would make a study. Dorothy would be proud of me could she hear me talk so learnedly," he said, smiling at his own seriousness, "but I do really believe half of the unaccountable accidents might be traced to the speed-madness."

"It does feel dreadfully reckless," said Tavia, realizing something of the power of speed, and taking off her sailor hat before the straw piece made away on its own account. "I think it would be just like flying to be in a real race."

"Not for mine," answered the practical Nat. "I like some kinds of a good time, but I have too much regard for the insurance company that saw fit to give me their 'promise to pay,' to trust my bones to the intelligence of a machine let loose. There is something so uncanny about a broken neck."

A toot of the horn warned passersby that the Fire-Bird was about to make a turn. Tavia bowed to those on the walk. Nat touched his cap.

"Who's the pretty one?" he asked, looking back, just a bit rudely, at Tavia's friends.

"Alice MacAllister, the nicest girl in Dalton, except –"

"Tavia Travers," finished Nat, politely. "Well, she does look nice. Better get up a lawn party or something and invite her, and incidentally ask Nat White."

Dorothy leaned forward to whisper to Tavia that Alice was going out Dighton way to play tennis, that Alice had told her she expected to win a trophy and this was the game to decide the series. Alice certainly looked capable of winning most anything, she was such an athletic girl, the kind called "tailor made," without being coarse or mannish.

Then the Fire-Bird flew on. Out over the hill that hid Dalton from its pretty suburbs, and then down into the glen that nestled so cozily in its fringe of pines and cedars. Nat slackened speed to allow the party full enjoyment of the shady road, and this gave all an opportunity of entering into lively conversation.

The boys wanted to know all about the mysterious man Anderson, who had been lodged in jail. As Dorothy and Tavia had played rather a conspicuous part in the man's capture, and all this had happened since the girls had been out to the Cedars, on their visit, naturally Ned and Nat were interested in the sensational news.

"I'm glad he's safe out of your reach, Doro," said Ned, "for you never seemed to know when or where he would turn up."

"Yes," put in Tavia, "Doro has actually gained flesh since we landed him. He was such a nuisance. Had no regard for persons or places."

"And how about the news from India?" asked Ned. "I suppose the major will sell out in Dalton and move to better accommodations now. Not but what Dalton is a first-rate place," seeing the look of reproach on Dorothy's face at the idea of anyone uttering a word against her beloved town, "but you know there are little conveniences in other places, postmen for instance, and well – something called society, you know."

"We have no thought of going away," answered Dorothy. "Father says the money is just enough to make us comfortable and there is plenty of comfort to be bought in Dalton."

"And some given away," ventured Nat, with an arch glance at Tavia.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Nat, as a forking of the road made a choice necessary.

"Through the glen," suggested Dorothy, "there is such a pretty spot there where we can lunch."

"Which spot?" asked Tavia, "I thought this was all road with deep gutters at the side, running down to the river over the hill."

"I am quite sure this is the road father took us out to picnic on," said Dorothy with some hesitation.

"Well, maybe," said Tavia, "but I think this is the old river road. It seems to me I have been out this way before, and never even found a place to gather wild flowers, all road and gutters, then a big bank to the river."

"Let's try it anyhow," decided Nat. "It looks nice and shady."

So the turn was made to the left, and presently another turn rounded, then another, until both Tavia and Dorothy lost all sense of the location.

"We will wind up somewhere," declared Nat, when the girls protested they would be lost if the machine were not turned around, and brought back to the river road.

"This is such a tangle of a place," insisted Dorothy, "and we really might not meet a person to direct us."

"Then we will keep right on, and run into the next state," joked Nat, to whom being lost was fun, and having an adventure the best part of a ride.

For some time the Fire-Bird flew along, the beautiful August day adding a wonderful charm to the tender shade of the oaks that lined the road, and through which just enough sunshine peeped to temper the balmy shadows.

"I am hungry. It must be lunch time," said Dorothy, as they reached a pretty spot, "let's stop here and eat."

"Let's," agreed Nat, slowing up the machine.

"What do you suppose this road is for?" asked Ned, as neither the rumble of a wagon wheel nor any other sound broke the stillness that surrounded the party.

"For instance," suggested Tavia.

"Or for maps," said Ned.

"For automobile parties," declared Dorothy.

"For yours truly," finished Nat, stretching himself on the soft sod, that came down to the road as beautifully as if it had been made to order on a well-kept terrace.

The girls soon had the lunch cloth spread and the basket was then produced – or rather its contents were brought forth.

"Yum, yum," exclaimed Nat, smacking his lips as Dorothy began placing the eatables on the cloth.

"Oh, but water," sighed Tavia. "We were to get some as we came in the woods. There is a fine spring there."

"Two miles back," announced Nat.

"But there must be one near here," declared Tavia, "for there are forget-me-nots in this grass."

"Is that a sign of water?" asked Ned.

"Positive – sure sign," replied Tavia. "Let's hunt for the spring."

"Too early," answered Nat, "against the game laws. Can't hunt for two whole months yet. Worse luck."

"Well, look for the spring then," Tavia corrected herself. "I fancy I smell watercress – "

"Well, of all the fanciers, – first bluebells mean spring water, then gasoline from our own tank smells like watercress. Now, Octavia Travers, I'll go you," said Nat. "Come and find spring water, bunches of watercress and a salt spring to go with the cress, or you will – walk home."

Tavia answered the challenge by skipping along through the grassy track, with Nat dragging lazily along at her heels.

"Don't get lost," cautioned Dorothy.

"And don't expect us to watch this food all afternoon," said Ned, as the two disappeared over a bank on the "still hunt" for water and perhaps watercress.

"Tavia knows everything that grows," remarked Dorothy to her cousin, "I think it is so interesting to have a practical knowledge of nature."

"And quite convenient when it comes to lemonade with water," answered the boy. "It's queer Nat is like that too. He always knows things about things when things are shy for a feed. Likely he'll bring back a small-sized patch of the vegetable kingdom."

Meanwhile the explorers were making discoveries at every glade.

"There," called Tavia, triumphantly, "that's a spring. But the announcement came a second too late to save Nat from a foot bath."

"So I have noticed," he declared, trying to shake some of the cold water out of his low cut shoes.

"Oh, that's too bad," Tavia managed to say, although her joy at finding the spring made any regret at the method of its discovery quite out of the question. Being careful of her own footing she made her way along, until the stone basin at the spring source came into view.

"Didn't I tell you?" she shouted. "And there is the watercress!"

She was on her knees now, leaning over like the goddess who saw her face reflected in the water. Tavia knew the peculiarities of a spring, and knew how to avoid the common penalty of wet feet when getting either cress or a drink "by hand."

"Let me," asked Nat, gallantly, as he saw her stooping over the brink.

"I do want some of the cress," she said.

"So do I," declared the knight. But alas; as he stepped to the brink he went down – down – down —

"Help!" he shouted, merrily, in spite of the second foot bath within a few minutes.

But Nat kept on sinking, until what seemed like a joke soon assumed a serious aspect.

"Give us a hand," he called to Tavia. "I must have struck quick-sand."

Tavia ran to the side of the pool where the boy was imbedded. He had jumped right in, instead of feeling his way as Tavia had, to make sure of his ground.

"Take my hand," said the girl anxiously, but the effort necessary in reaching toward her only served to make the unfortunate youth sink farther down.

"I guess you'll have to go for help," he admitted finally, the danger of the situation forcing itself upon him.

"But suppose you should go under while I am gone?" faltered Tavia.

"Just pull that tree branch over to me," said Nat, "and I'll cling to that. This must be a glue spring. My, but it has a grip! There goes my shoe."

"I'll run for Ned," cried Tavia, after she had given the boy in the pool a hold on the tree branch, and then she shot across the fields like a deer, leaving Nat to "say his prayers," as he described the situation.

It seemed a long time to the imprisoned boy, but as a matter of fact, Tavia was back very soon with "reinforcements."

Besides Dorothy and Ned, there came to the rescue a woman, who just happened by and heard of the danger. She knew the spring, and, depositing her basket of eggs in a safe place, pulled a fence rail from its post, and with Ned holding one end hurried on to the spring. By this time Nat was almost exhausted, for though it was an August day, standing to the waist in cold spring water was not an enjoyable position.

"I found the spring," he tried to joke, as the others came up to him.

"So we see," drawled Ned.

"Here," called the strange woman, who evidently knew exactly what to do. "Young man, you take this end of the rail to the other side. I'll hold my end here, and the boy can pull out across it."

Dorothy and Tavia looked on anxiously. They had heard of persons being swallowed up in quick-sands. Might not this be such a danger?

The pool was uncomfortably wide just where Nat chose to try its depth, so that it was difficult to span it with the fence rail.

"Easy now," called the little woman in the big sunbonnet. "Take hold first, then draw yourself up."

Nat was only too anxious to do as he was told. It did seem so good to have something solid within reach once more.

But tug as he would, he could not extricate his feet.

"Guess some Chinaman has a hold of me," he said, trying to make the best of his predicament.

"Wait a minute," called the farm woman. "There, now, you take the rail to the top of the spring and get down on it. Then you (to Nat) swing right up on it – now there, you've got it! Hold tight. Come here young girls. Quick! Pull! Pull! Altogether! There you are!" and, at that moment, a very muddy form was dragged from the spring. Nat was on dry land again.

CHAPTER III

A QUEER SPRING SUIT

"Don't stop to talk unless you want to get the chills from that spring," urged the little country woman in the big sunbonnet, "but just chase across that field as fast as you can. If we are not on the road when you get there, keep right on running. It's the only thing. Then I'll see what I can do for you in the line of clothes. Sam hasn't got much, but they're clean."

Nat stood shivering. The mud had relieved him of both shoes.

"Run along," ordered the woman, "I tell you I know all about the kind of chills that come from that spring water. Why, we don't even eat the watercress out of it this summer, so many folks that did eat it were taken down. My son Sam had a spell. The doctor stuck to it it was swimmin' but I knowed better; it was eatin' that poison watercress."

By this time Nat had followed directions and was going across the fields as fast as his uncomfortable legs would carry him. Tavia was running also; she felt it was her duty to stick by Nat, and get to the road with him, in case he should need any help.

Dorothy could not hide her dismay. Nat might get cold, he certainly had spoiled some good clothes, and the automobile ride would not be as pleasant now. How could it be with such a soaked boy at the wheel? And he was sure to stick to his post.

"Isn't it awful!" Dorothy remarked to Ned, as they hurried along after Nat and Tavia, while the country woman jogged on ahead of them.

"Nothing of the sort," he contradicted her. "It will add to his general knowledge, and what an experience it will be when it is handed out to the fellows! Nat frequently has a way of making narrow escapes. Chances are, some subterranean monster held him down in that spring. Oh, that accident will just be pie for Nat," and his brother laughed at the possible story Nat would concoct about his spring bath.

Breaking through the clump of bushes that divided the field from the road Nat and Tavia could be seen racing up and down like a pair in "training."

"That's right," called the woman, "just cut across there to that house. I'll be there almost as soon as you."

And in truth the farm woman was "no slouch," as Ned expressed it, for she tramped along at such an even pace that Dorothy found it difficult to keep up with her on the rough roads.

The farm house was of the typical old-fashioned kind; long and narrow, like a train of cars side-tracked, Ned thought. Vines that had become tired creeping clung tenaciously to window sills and broken porch rails, while clumsy old apple trees leaned lazily toward the stone house, although they were expected to keep their place, and outline a walk to the garden.

"Come right in the kitchen," invited the little woman. "I'll go upstairs and get the clothes, and then the young man can wash up a bit. Sam always keeps plenty of clean water in his room in summer time – ain't so pertic'lar about it in winter."

Nat hesitated on the door sill. Although the place presented that crowded and almost untidy scene, so common to back doors in the country, the room within was clean and orderly, and Nat had no idea of carrying his mud through the apartment.

Tavia, seeing his predicament, promptly found the broom and began such a vigorous scraping of the muddy clothes that Nat backed down to a bench and fell over it.

"There," exclaimed Tavia, "no more will come off, I'm sure."

"So am I," gasped Nat. "I wonder – well, never mind, you brushed me all right. If ever you want work just let me know."

The woman, who had introduced herself as Mrs. Hardy, was at the door now, and ordered Nat to come in at once.

"For clothes," she began, "I left out Sam's brand new pair of overalls. They hain't never been on him, and I thought they'd be better than anything else for summer. Then there's a clean soft shirt, and you won't need no coat, as it's a sight too warm to-day for coats. Them sneak shoes Sam only bought Saturday night. He likes to wear them to picnics, and there's to be one to-morrow evenin'."

Nat seemed unable to thank the woman. He really felt so miserable, physically, and so confused mentally, that his usual ready wit forsook him. But Dorothy could have hugged that dear little woman who was so kind and thoughtful. Ned was out in the motor car, so Dorothy was the one in "authority."

"You are so kind," she faltered to Mrs. Hardy, as Nat's muddy heels lost themselves from view up the box stairs. "I'm sure we cannot thank you enough."

"Tut, tut," interrupted the woman, busying herself at once about the little cook stove. "If the same thing happened to my Sam I know you'd do as much for him. He'll be in to dinner. Maybe you'll see him. I am proud of Sam. He's all I've got, of course, that makes some difference."

Ned now brought the machine up to the front of the house. He blew the horn to attract attention and Tavia ran out.

"Of all the luck," he stammered, trying to talk and laugh at the same time, "every scrap of our lunch is gone. Dogs, chickens, and maybe a boy or two took it. At any rate, they did not leave as much as the basket."

"Oh," gasped Tavia. "Isn't that mean!"

"Rather," answered the boy. "But perhaps we can get some crackers and milk here. I feel that the pangs of hunger will do something desperate presently. Nat, I suppose, will get a warm drink, and no doubt something to make him strong – homemade bread is the usual, I think. But I may starve," and he looked truly mournful – dinner hour was "flush" as he expressed it, meaning that the time had come to eat, as both hour and minute hand were hugging twelve, whistles blowing and a distant bell sounding, all of which indicated meal time was "flush."

"What's the matter?" asked Dorothy, coming around the house.

"The commissary department has been looted," said Ned. "In other words, our grub is gone."

"Gone!" echoed Dorothy, incredulously.

"The very gonest gone you ever saw. Not so much as a toothpick left."

"What shall we do," sighed the girl, who had put up such a tempting lunch, and had even partly spread it out on the paper-cloth in that "safe" place under the tree.

"Victuals gone?" asked Mrs. Hardy, from the side window. "I might have told you as much, only for hurryin' to get them wet clothes off that boy. Why, our hounds would steal the eggs from the nests, worst thieves I ever saw. Well, never mind. When I get Sam back to the hayfield I'll do what I can for you. But he has to be quick, for it's all cut and there's no telling when a thunder storm 'll come up."

"Oh, we wouldn't think of troubling you so much," demurred Dorothy.

"Is there any store around?" asked Ned, significantly.

"One a mile off that has not a morsel fit to eat in it. I'd as soon swallow poison as eat anything out of that place. Here, young girl (to Tavia), you run down to the dairy there, the door is unlocked, and bring up a pail of milk that's on the bench under the window. I'll give you a couple of glasses and you can help yourselves until Sam gets done."

Tavia hurried off, willing enough to fetch the milk, and before she reached the door on her return trip – there was Nat!

Nobody dared to laugh. What might Mrs. Hardy think?

But Nat in overalls! And a dark blue shirt! And the yellow sneaks!

"Splendid," declared Dorothy, feeling the absolute necessity of saying something grateful.

"I feel like a new man," said Nat.

"Bet you do now," spoke Mrs. Hardy, looking him over approvingly. "Nothing like clean clothes, and them is becoming."

Nat went near her so he could carry on conversation without delaying the dinner preparations.

"That spring suit," he said laughing, "I'll just throw down on the rubbish heap. The clothes are so covered with mud, I am sure they never could be cleaned, and if Sam will have time to get in town before the picnic perhaps he can sell me these things. Or, if not, I'll buy whatever he wants and send them out."

"Well, he won't need the overalls till next week," answered the mother.

"Then I can buy them?" asked Nat.

"And the shoes – "

"I'll have a pair sent out directly I reach town. I'll see that they come special so there will be no mistake."

"And the shirt – you are welcome to that."

"Now then," said Nat, "here's five dollars, whatever will be over the price of the clothes I am sure I owe you – "

"Five dollars!" exclaimed the woman with genuine surprise. "Why, bless you boy, that would buy my Sam a full, whole winter suit."

"Get him one, then," insisted Nat. "I would be glad to help him, as he certainly has helped me greatly. Just surprise him with a new suit for the picnic. We'll be off as soon as I get my share of that milk, if they have left me any, then he will know nothing of the accident. You can give him a complete surprise," seeing the look of delight on the poor woman's face.

"But you dasen't drink none of that cold milk," she protested. "Step right over here to a cup of tea, it's just fresh. But I don't feel I should take all that money."

"Oh, just to give Sam a little surprise," argued Nat, "and indeed, I owe it to you, for I might have taken an awful cold," and he drank down his "piping" hot tea.

"Well, Sam will be happy," admitted the mother fondly, "and if you can afford it – "

"Of course I can. There, they have actually stopped drinking. We are so much obliged for the invitation to take dinner, Mrs. Hardy, but we couldn't really stay," finished Nat.

"No," said Dorothy, coming in at that moment, "it is very kind of you to ask us, Mrs. Hardy, but my cousin says we must go on. Here is something for the milk – "

"No more money!" declared the woman. "I've taken more now than the Bible would say was due me."

"Oh, just this change," urged Dorothy.

"Not a penny! Not one cent!" Mrs. Hardy insisted, but as Dorothy stepped out to join the others, who by this time were getting into the car, she managed to find a place to hide the coins – where Mrs. Hardy would find them later on.

"I'm to the bat," said Ned, as Nat took up his place in front.

"Not much," shouted Nat. "I haven't been put out yet, and, in overalls and blue shirt, Nat, the good-looking and always well-dressed boy, let loose the Fire-Bird for another fly through the country."

CHAPTER IV

A DAY OF DANGERS

"What do you suppose will happen next?" asked Dorothy, as the automobile sped along the narrow road through a woodland way.

"Don't tempt the fates," cautioned Ned, "we can always get enough trouble without beckoning it."

"It was good sport, meeting the little country woman and all that," said Nat, "but I must admit I did not enjoy the mud bath. I have heard of mud baths in sanitariums. Do you suppose they are that kind?"

"Oh, no," laughed Ned. "They perfume the mud and mix it with bay rum. Then they allow it to trickle down your spinal column to the rhythm of your favorite poem – so many drops to so many feet."

"I'll never forget how you looked when you came up on that rail," declared Tavia, merrily. "I have heard of such things, but that is the first time I ever saw any one really ride a rail – "

"And my initial performance, I assure you. Well, do not be so painfully faithful as never to forget my appearance. I think you might sympathize with a fellow."

But Tavia only laughed more heartily. She declared he could not have been drowned; of course it was wet and cold and muddy —

"And he might have fallen, and not have been able to get to his feet again," remarked Dorothy, with apprehension. "I am awfully afraid of mysterious accidents; and who can tell what is at the bottom of a spring?"

"For expert testimony," replied Nat, "apply to Nathaniel White, Esquire. He is in every way qualified – Oh, I say, my knee! Ouch! Can't move it," and he winced in pain.

"Let me get there," insisted Ned, "you may take a kink somewhere and make us turn turtle. Besides you will not get so much breeze back here."

Nat was easily persuaded now, for the fact was he did not feel at all comfortable – the mud bath was getting in its work, – so the machine was stopped while he got in the tonneau and his brother took the place at the wheel.

"Put this dust robe around you," ordered Dorothy. "You may miss your coat in spite of the day, for the wind is sharp when we cut through the air this way. I do hope you will not be ill – "

"Never! That race Mrs. Hardy gave me, or made me take, saved my life. But it's pleasant to change seats. Ned will get a lot of laughs from Tavia, and I will enjoy a chance to talk with you."

So the little party dashed along, until a turn in the road brought a row of houses into view, and presently, among them, could be seen a sign that indicated eatables were for sale there. Both girls and boys went in to do the buying – so keen were their appetites now that each preferred to do his or her own selecting. Tavia wanted buns, cheese and pickles. Nat had cheese, rye bread and butter (he bought a quarter of a pound) and besides he found, on the very tip top shelf, some glass jars of boneless herring.

"Let's make a regular camp dinner," suggested Ned. "Buy some potatoes and sliced bacon, make tea or coffee – "

"In what?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, yes, that's so. We did not bring the lunch basket. By the way, you have not seen the basket mother received for her birthday. It has everything for a lunch on the road; a lamp to cook over, tea and coffee pot, enameled cups, plates, good sharp knives – the neatest things, all in a small basket. Mother never lets us take it out, when we're alone. She thinks so much of it."

"I should think she would," remarked Dorothy. "But we were speaking of a camp lunch – "

"Yes, let's," joined in Nat. "It's no end of fun, roasting potatoes in a stone furnace."

"And toasting bacon on hat pins," suggested Tavia.

So it was agreed the camp lunch should be their meal, Dorothy and Ned doing most of the work of buying and finding things fresh enough to eat in the old-fashioned dusty store, while Tavia and Nat tasted pickles and tried buns, until Dorothy interposed, declaring if either ate another mouthful before the real meal was ready they would not be allowed a single warm morsel.

"Just one potato," pleaded Nat. "I do so love burnt potatoes."

"And a single slice of bacon," urged Tavia. "I haven't had that kind of bacon since we were out at the Cedars, and I think it is so delicious."

"Then save your appetites," insisted Dorothy, "and help with the work. No looking for fresh spring water this time. Nat, carry this bottle of milk. Ned has paid for the bottle and all, so we will not have to come back with the jar."

The paper bundles were finally put into the car, and then, turning back to the woodland road, it was not difficult to find a place suitable to build the camp-fire, and set table on a big stump of a newly-felled tree that Tavia said made her more hungry than ever, for the chips smelt like vinegar and molasses, she declared.

So pleasant was the camp life our friends had embarked upon, they did not notice how far the afternoon was getting away from them, and before they had any inclination to start out on the road again, the sun had rolled itself up into a big red ball, and was sinking down behind the hills.

"Oh, it may be dark before we get back to Dalton," said Dorothy in alarm. "We should have started an hour ago."

"But the potatoes were not done," Tavia reminded her, "and we never could have left without eating them after carrying cords and cords of wood to the oven."

"Get aboard," called Nat, "I'll take the wheel now, Ned. I'm entirely thawed out."

It had certainly been a delightful day, even the accident at the spring was now merely an event to laugh at, while the meal on the big chestnut stump, beside the camp-fire, had been so enjoyable, and now, all that remained was the pleasant ride home. That is all that appeared to remain, but automobile rides, like chickens, should not be counted until all is over, and the machine is safely put up for the night. Chickens have the same tendency as have autos toward surprises – and disappointments.

"There's a hill," remarked Ned, quite unnecessarily, as a long stretch of brown road seemed to bound up in front of them.

"A nice climb," acquiesced Nat. "Now, Birdy, be good. Straight ahead. No flunking now – steady," and he "coaxed" the machine into a slow, even run, that became more and more irksome as the grade swelled.

"But when we get at the top?" asked Tavia.

"We will not stay there long," answered Nat, "for if there is one thing this machine likes to do it is to coast down hill."

The Fire-Bird made its way up the steep grade, and presently, as Nat predicted, turned the hill-crest and "flew" down the other side.

The swiftness of the motion made conversation impossible, for the machine was coasting, the power being off, and surely the Fire-Bird was "flying through the air."

Reaching the level stretch again, Nat threw in the clutch, but a grinding and clanking noise answered his movement of the lever.

"Hello!" called Ned from the rear. "Busted!"

"Something wrong," agreed Ned, looking at the spark and gasoline controllers.

Presently, as the boys expected, the machine slowed up, and then came to a stop.

Both were out at once, and they examined the mechanism together.

"It's the leather facings on the friction clutch," declared Ned. "See that one worn off?"

"Guess that's right," answered Ned. "Well, now for a horse."

"I sold my wheel for an automobile; Get a horse! Get a horse!" sang Tavia, while she and Dorothy climbed out to join the inspection committee.

"Is it bad?" asked Dorothy.

"Bad enough to stall us until we can get it fixed up somewhere," said Ned. "We'll have to take part of the clutch out," and he proceeded to do so.

"Yes, we cannot move until we get a new leather on here," added Nat. "I wonder how far we might be from a blacksmith shop."

"A couple of miles," answered Tavia. "I have often been through this woods."

"Then I suppose," went on Ned, rather dolefully, "there is nothing to be done but 'hike' to the shop."

"You go and I'll stay and take care of the girls," suggested Nat.

"Oh, both go," chimed in Tavia. "You will get back sooner, and you may have some trouble getting it fixed at the shop, for I have been there and I know the man is as deaf as a post and – other things," she finished vaguely. "There is a house just across the fields there and we are not the least bit afraid –"

"If it will hurry the work you had best both go," Dorothy added. "As Tavia says, there is a house in sight, and we could run there if anything came along to scare us."

"Well, trot along Nat," commanded Ned, as he took up the piece of the clutch. "This is sure your busy day. I'll race you to the bend to make good time, and I assure you, young ladies, we will not be one moment longer than necessary away from you."

"We are so very fond of you," joked Nat, "that every moment will be unto us an hour –"

"Oh, come, quit your nonsense, if you are going to run –"

But before Ned had finished, his brother had gained quite a handicap and was making tracks through the glen, and then out again into the open.

"Isn't it lonely," said Dorothy, getting into the disabled machine after the youths were out of sight.

"Not a bit," declared Tavia. "No tramps around here. But such a day! I almost feel as if one more thing must happen. Bad luck goes in threes, you know. One more will surely make up our day –"

"Oh, please don't talk so," and Dorothy shivered. "I do wish we were safely back in Dalton."

"And the boys gone back to the Cedars! Well, I would rather have the ride ahead of me, than to have it all ended. It is so nice to have good times. Sometimes I think I'll just run away, and see what there is to do and observe outside of that stupid old Dalton," exclaimed Tavia.

"Tavia!" and Dorothy's voice betrayed how shocked she was at the very thought of such a thing as "running away." "How can you talk so?"

"Oh, it's all very well for you, Doro. You can have and do as you please; but poor me! I must be content –"

"Tavia, I am sure I heard someone coming!" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Quite likely. This is a common road, you know. We have no fence around it."

"But suppose it should be some rough person –"

"If we don't like his looks when he comes up we can run," said Tavia, coolly.

"And leave the car?"

"Can't take it with us, surely."

For a few moments neither girl spoke. Dorothy had never gotten over the frights she had received when the man Anderson followed her for the purpose of getting information about the Burlock matter, and every trifling thing alarmed her now.

"It's a man," said Tavia, as the form of a heavily-built fellow could now be discerned on the path.

"Oh, and he has that same kind of hat on," sighed Dorothy, referring to the hat previously worn by Anderson.

"And it – really – does look like him! Let's run! We have just about time to get to that house. Come out this side. There, give me your hand," and Tavia, glancing back to the figure in the road, took Dorothy's hand and urged her on over the rough path, until Dorothy felt she must fall from fright and exhaustion.

The road to the farm house was on a little side path turning off from the one followed by the boys on their way to the blacksmith shop. Having once gained the spot where the roads met, Tavia stopped to look back at the car.

"I declare!" she gasped. "He is climbing into the machine."

"Oh, what shall we do?" wailed Dorothy.

"Can't do a thing but hide here until the boys come. We can see him if he gets out, but if we went over to the house we might miss the boys, and they might run right into his arms."

"Oh," cried Dorothy. "I am so dreadfully frightened. Don't you suppose we can get any help until the boys come?"

"Not unless someone happens to pass. And this is a back road: no one seems to go home from work this way."

"Oh, if someone only would!" and Dorothy was now almost in tears.

"Just see!" exclaimed Tavia, "he is examining the front now. Suppose he could start it up?"

"But he cannot," Dorothy declared, "if the car worked the boys would never have left us here all alone," and again she was dangerously near shedding tears.

"There now, he is getting in again. Well, I hope he stays there until someone comes," said Tavia. "Isn't it getting dark?"

"And if the boys do not get back – Oh, perhaps we had better run right straight on. We may get to some town –"

"We would be running into a deeper woods, and goodness knows, it is dark enough here. No, we had better stay near the house, then, if worst comes to worst, we can ask them to keep us all night –"

"Tavia you make me shudder," cried Dorothy. "Of course we will not have to do any such thing."

But Tavia's spirit of adventure was thoroughly aroused, and, in her sensational way, she forgot for the moment the condition of Dorothy's nerves, and really enjoyed the speculation of what might happen if "the worst came to the worst."

"There he goes again," she burst out, beginning to see humor in the situation, as the figure in the car climbed from the front seat to the back. "He is like the little girl who got into the house of the 'Three Bears.' One is too high and one is too low – there now, Doro, he has found your place 'just right' and will go to sleep there, see if he doesn't."

"Hark! That's Ned's voice –"

"And that's Nat's –"

"Yes, there they come. Oh, I am so glad –"

"Me too," said Tavia, in her pardonable English.

"Had we better go and meet them?"

"No, indeed, the man in the car might take it into his head to come to. Better keep quiet."

Presently Ned and Nat reached the corner.

"Hush," called Tavia, coming out from her hiding-place.

"Well, what on earth –" began Nat.

"Listen," commanded Tavia. "There's a man in the car. He has been there ever since you went away –"

"In our car! Well, his time is up," blurted out Ned. "He must move on," and the boy's manner indicated, "I will make him move on."

"But he may be dangerous," cried Dorothy. "Oh, please Ned, don't go near him until you have someone to help you!"

"And what would I be doing?" said Nat, in that same challenging manner. "Come along, Ned. We will teach that fellow to let our girls and our property alone."

"But please!" begged Dorothy, clinging to Ned. "Call someone from that house. He did look so like –"

"Our friend Anderson," finished Tavia, for Dorothy seemed too frightened to utter the name.

"Did he though?" and Nat gave Ned a significant look. "All the more reason why I should like to make his acquaintance. You girls will have to hide here until we get rid of him, and we have no time to spare if we want to work by daylight. Come along, Ned. Girls, don't be the least alarmed. We will be down the road after you in a jiffy. It won't take two seconds to put in this clutch."

"But I feel sure it is that dreadful man," wailed Dorothy. "Oh, if some strong person would only come!"

"Now, you just sit down there," said Ned, tenderly, "and when you hear us whistle you will know it is all right. It may be only a poor farmer resting on his way home."

But the girls were too certain that no farmer would have enjoyed climbing from one seat to the other as they had seen this man doing, and they had strange misgivings about him – of course Anderson was in jail, but —

"Now, don't be a bit worried," added Nat. "We will be spinning down the road directly," and at this the boys left the girls again, and started down the road to interview the strange man in their automobile.

"Oh, I do feel as if I shall die!" cried Dorothy. "Let us pray, Tavia, that nothing will happen to the boys!"

"You pray, but I have to watch," answered Tavia, not realizing how scriptural her words were, "for if they should need help I have got to go to that house after it."

Then, on the damp grass, poor Dorothy buried her head in prayer, such prayer as can come only from a heart in distress.

Tavia, as she had said, stood straight out in the middle of the road, watching through the dim light.

The boys were at the car now, and they were speaking to the man!

CHAPTER V

THE POLICE PATROL

For some moments neither girl spoke: Tavia stood out in the road like an officer, while Dorothy did not lift her head from her attitude of prayer. Suddenly Dorothy, in a frenzy of fear, rushed out to where Tavia stood, and threw her arms around her.

"Tavia," she exclaimed, "I must go to them. I cannot stand another moment like this – I am simply choking. Come: See, they have not been able to manage him. He is in the car yet. Oh, do let us go!" and the look on the terrified girl's face so frightened Tavia she forgot to watch, forgot everything but Dorothy – something would surely happen to her if that anxiety was not soon relieved.

But to go to the boys! Might not that make matters worse?

"Dorothy, darling," began Tavia, "don't be so frightened. Perhaps they are just talking pleasantly to him – "

"Then I must hear them. I must know what it is all about. Do come!" and she tried to drag Tavia from the spot to which she seemed riveted.

"If you would only wait here while I go down first, and then if it is all right, that is, if the boys want us to come – "

"No, no," cried Dorothy. "I must go at once! See! Oh, Nat is coming this way – "

"Yes, here comes Nat. It will be all right now," and Tavia was soothing Dorothy as if she were a baby – patting her, smoothing her hair, and even pressing her lips to her cheek. In truth Dorothy appeared as weak as a baby, and seemed to require that help which a loving human hand may impart to a nervous body, at once the sense of protection and the assurance of sympathy.

"Ned is starting up the machine," exclaimed Tavia. "Oh, I know. He is going to give the man a ride."

Little dreaming how truly she spoke, for indeed Ned was going to give the strange man a stranger ride, Tavia showed Dorothy that she believed everything was all right now, and then Nat was there – they could call to him. Yes, he was whistling lightly. How silly they were to have been frightened!

"What is it?" demanded Dorothy, as soon as her cousin could hear her voice.

"I guess it was – "

"Nat! Nat!" screamed Tavia, at the same time running to him and whispering a word in his ear.

"There, now, Dorothy. Didn't I tell you. Only a poor farmer. Where did he say he lived, Nat?"

"Tavia, you told Nat not to tell me – "

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