

Emerson Alice B.

**Ruth Fielding Down in Dixie;
Great Times in the Land
of Cotton**



Alice Emerson

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Ruth Fielding Down in Dixie / Great Times in the Land of Cotton

CHAPTER I – A WOLF IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING

“Isn’t that the oddest acting girl you ever saw, Ruth?”

“Goodness! what a gawky thing!” agreed Ruth Fielding, who was just getting out of the taxicab, following her chum, Helen Cameron.

“And those white-stitched shoes!” gasped Helen. “Much too small for her, I do believe!”

“How that skirt does hang!” exclaimed Ruth.

“She looks just as though she had slept in all her clothes,” said Helen, giggling. “What do you suppose is the matter with her, Ruth?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” Ruth Fielding said. “She’s going on this boat with us, I guess. Maybe we can get acquainted with her,” and she laughed.

“Excuse *me!*” returned Helen. “I don’t think I care to. Oh, look!”

The girl in question – who was odd looking, indeed – had been paying the cabman who had brought her to the head of the dock. The dock was on West Street, New York City, and the chums from Cheslow and the Red Mill had never been in the metropolis before. So they were naturally observant of everything and everybody about them.

The strange girl, after paying her fare, started to thrust her purse into the shabby handbag she carried. Just then one of the colored porters hurried forward and took up the suitcase that the girl had set down on the ground at her feet when she stepped from the cab.

“Right dis way, miss,” said the porter politely, and started off with the suitcase.

“Hey! what are you doing?” demanded the girl in a sharp and shrill voice; and she seized the handle of the bag before the porter had taken more than a step.

She grabbed it so savagely and gave it such a determined jerk, that the porter was swung about and almost thrown to the ground before he could let go of the handle.

“I’ll ‘tend to my own bag,” said this vigorous young person, and strode away down the dock, leaving the porter amazed and the bystanders much amused.

“My goodness!” gasped the negro, when he got his breath. “Dat gal is as strong as a ox – sho’ is! I nebber seed her like. *She* don’t need no he’p, *she* don’t.”

“Let him take our bags – poor fellow,” said Helen, turning around after paying their own driver. “Wasn’t that girl rude?”

“Here,” said Ruth, laughing and extending her light traveling bag to the disturbed porter, “you may carry *our* bags to the boat. We’re not as strong as that girl.”

“She sho’ was a strong one,” said the negro, grinning. “I declar’ for’t, missy! I ain’ nebber seed no lady so strong befo’.”

“Isn’t he delicious?” whispered Helen, pinching Ruth’s arm as they followed the man down the dock. “*He’s* no Northern negro. Why, he sounds just as though we were as far as Virginia, at least, already! Oh, my dear! our fun has begun.”

“I feel awfully important,” admitted Ruth. “And I guess you do. Traveling alone all the way from Cheslow to New York.”

“And this city *is* so big,” sighed Helen. “I hope we can stop and see it when we come back from the Land of Cotton.”

They were going aboard the boat that would take them down the coast of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia to the Capes of Virginia and Old Point Comfort. There they were to meet their Briarwood Hall schoolmate, Nettie Parsons, and her aunt, Mrs. Rachel Parsons.

The girls and their guide passed a gang of stevedores rushing the last of the freight aboard the boat, their trucks making a prodigious rumbling.

They came to the passenger gangway along which the porter led them aboard and to the purser's office. There he waited, clinging to the bags, until the ship's officer had looked at their tickets and stateroom reservation, and handed them the key.

"Lemme see dat, missy," said the porter to Ruth. "I done know dis boat like a book, I sho' does."

"And, poor fellow, I don't suppose he ever looked inside a book," whispered Helen. "Isn't he comical?"

Ruth was afraid the porter would hear them talking about him, so she fell back until the man with the bags was some distance ahead. He was leading them to the upper saloon deck. Their reservation, which Tom Cameron, Helen's twin brother, had telegraphed for, called for an outside stateroom, forward, on this upper deck – a pleasantly situated room.

Tom could not come with his sister and her chum, for he was going into the woods with some of his school friends; but he was determined that the girls should have good accommodations on the steamboat to Old Point Comfort and Norfolk.

"And he's just the best boy!" Ruth declared, fumbling in her handbag as they viewed the cozy stateroom. "Oh! here's Mrs. Sadoc Smith's letter."

Helen had tipped the grinning darkey royally and he had shuffled out. She sat down now on the edge of the lower berth. This was the first time the chums had ever been aboard a boat for over night, and the "close comforts" of a stateroom were quite new to Helen and Ruth.

"What a dinky little washstand," Helen said. "Oh, my! Ruth, see the ice-water pitcher and tumblers in the rack. Guess they expect the boat to pitch a good deal. Do you suppose it will be rough?"

"Don't know. Listen to this," Ruth said shortly, reading the letter which she had opened. "I only had a chance to glance at Mrs. Smith's letter before we started. Just listen here: She says Curly has got into trouble."

"Curly?" cried Helen, suddenly interested. "Never! What's he done now?"

"I guess this isn't any fun," said Ruth, seriously. "His grandmother is greatly disturbed. The constable has been to the house looking for Curly and threatens to arrest him."

"The poor boy!" exclaimed Helen. "I knew he was an awful cut-up –"

"But there never was an ounce of meanness in Henry Smith!" Ruth declared, quite excited. "I don't believe it can be as bad as she thinks."

"His grandmother has always been so strict with him," said Helen. "You know how she treated him while we were lodging with her when the new West Dormitory at Briarwood was being built."

"I remember very clearly," agreed Ruth. "And, after all, Curly wasn't such a bad fellow. Mrs. Smith says he threatens to run away. *That* would be awful."

"Goodness! I believe I'd run away myself," said Helen, "if I had anybody who nagged me as Mrs. Sadoc Smith does Henry."

"And she doesn't mean to. Only she doesn't like boys – nor understand them," Ruth said, as she folded the letter with a sigh. "Poor Curly!"

"Come on! let's get out on deck and see them start. I do just long to see the wonderful New York skyline that everybody talks about."

"And the tall buildings that we couldn't see from the taxicab window," added Ruth.

"Who's going to keep the key?" demanded Helen, as Ruth locked the stateroom door.

"I am. You're not to be trusted, young lady," laughed Ruth. "Where's your handbag?"

"Why – I left it inside."

“With all that money in it? Smart girl! And the window blind is not locked. The rules say never to leave the room without locking the window or the blind.”

“I’ll fix *that*,” declared Helen, and reached in to slide the blind shut. They heard the catch snap and were satisfied.

As they went through the passage from the outer deck to the saloon they saw a figure stalking ahead of them which made Helen all but cry out.

“I see her,” Ruth whispered. “It’s the same girl.”

“And she’s going into that stateroom,” added Helen, as the person unlocked the door of an inside room.

“I’d like to see her face,” Ruth said, smiling. “I see she has curly hair, and I believe it’s short.”

“We’ll look her up after the steamboat gets off. Her room is number forty-eight,” Helen said. “Come on, dear! Feel the jar of the engines? They must be casting off the hawsers.”

The girls went up another flight of broad, polished stairs and came out upon the hurricane deck. They were above the roof of the dock and could look down upon it and see the people bidding their friends on the boat good-bye while the vessel backed out into the stream. The starting was conducted with such precision that they heard few orders given, and only once did the engine-room gong clang excitedly.

The steamer soon swung its stern upstream, and the bow came around, clearing the end of the pier next below, and so heading down the North River. Certain tugboats and wide ferries tooted their defiance at the ocean-going craft, for the vessel on which Ruth and Helen were traveling was one of the largest coast-wise steamers sailing out of the port.

It was a lovely afternoon toward the close of June. The city had been as hot as a roasting pan, Helen said; but on the high deck the breeze, breathed from the Jersey hills, lifted the damp locks from the girls’ brows. A soft mist crowned the Palisades. The sun, already descending, drew another veil before his face as he dropped behind the Orange Mountains, his red rays glistening splendidly upon the towers and domes of lower Broadway.

They passed the Battery in a few minutes, with the round, pot-bellied aquarium and the immigration offices. The upper bay was crowded with craft of all kind. The Staten Island ferries drummed back and forth, the perky little ferryboat to Ellis Island and the tugboat to the Statue of Liberty crossed their path. In their wake the small craft dipped in the swell of the propeller’s turmoil.

The Statue of Liberty herself stood tall and stately in the afternoon sunlight, holding her green, bronze torch aloft. The girls could not look at this monument without being impressed by its stateliness and noble features.

“And we’ve read about it, and thought so much about this present of Miss Picolet’s nation to ours! It is very wonderful,” Ruth said.

“And that fort! See it?” cried Helen, pointing to Governor’s Island on the other bow. “Oh, and see, Ruth! that great, rusty, iron steamship anchored out yonder. She must be a great, sea-going tramp.”

Every half minute there was something new for the chums to exclaim over.

In fifteen minutes they were passing through the Narrows. The two girls were staring back at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, when a petty officer above on the lookout post hailed the bridge amidships.

“Launch coming up, sir. Port, astern.”

There was a sudden rush of those passengers in the bows who heard to the port side. “Oh, come on. Let’s see!” cried Helen, and away the two girls went with the crowd.

The perky little launch shoved up close to the side of the tall steamer. It flew a pennant which the girls did not understand; but some gentleman near them said laughingly:

“That is a police launch. I guess we’re all arrested. See! they’re coming aboard.”

The steamer did not slow down at all; but one of the men in the bow of the pitching launch threw a line with a hook on the end of it, and this fastened itself over the rail of the lower deck. By leaning over the rail above Ruth and Helen could see all that went on below.

In a moment deckhands caught the line and hauled up with it a rope ladder. This swung perilously – so the girls thought – over the green-and-white leaping waves.

A man started up the swinging ladder. The steamer dipped ever so little and he scrambled faster to keep out of the water's reach.

"The waves act just like hungry wolves, or like dogs, leaping after their prey," said Ruth reflectively. "See them! They almost caught his legs that time."

Another man started up the ladder the moment the first one had swarmed over the rail. Then another came, and a fourth. Four men in all boarded the still fast-moving steamer. Everybody was talking eagerly about it, and nobody knew what it meant.

These men were surely not passengers who had been belated, for the launch still remained attached to the steamer.

Ruth and Helen went back into the saloon. There they saw their smiling porter, now in the neat black dress of a waiter, bustling about. "Any little t'ing I kin do fo' yo', missy?" he asked.

"No, thank you," Ruth replied, smiling. But Helen burst out with: "Do tell us what those men have come aboard for?"

"Dem men from de *po*-lice launch?" inquired the black man.

"Yes. What are they after? Are they police?"

"Ya-as'm. Dem's *po*-lice," said the darkey, rolling his eyes. "Dey tell me dey is wantin' a boy wot's been stealin' – an' he's done got girl's clo'es on, missy."

"A boy in girl's clothing?" gasped Ruth.

"A wolf in sheep's clothing!" laughed her chum.

"Ya-as indeedy, missy. Das wot dey say."

"Are they *sure* he came aboard this boat?" asked Ruth anxiously.

"Sho is, missy. Dey done trailed him right to de dock. Das wot de head steward heard 'em say. De taxicab man remembered him – he acted so funny in dem girl's clo'es – he, he, he! Das one silly trick, das wot *dat* is," chuckled the darkey. "No boy gwine t' look like his sister in her clo'es – no, indeedy."

But Ruth and Helen were now staring at each other with the same thought in their minds. "Oh, Helen!" murmured Ruth. And, "Oh, Ruth!" responded Helen.

"Ought we to tell?" pursued Helen, putting all the burden of deciding the question on her chum as usual. "It's that very strange looking girl we saw going into number forty-eight; isn't it?"

"It is most certainly that person," agreed Ruth positively.

CHAPTER II – THE WORM TURNS

Ruth Fielding was plentifully supplied with good sense. Under ordinary circumstances she would not have tried to shield any person who was a fugitive from justice.

But in this case there seemed to her no reason for Helen and her to volunteer information – especially when such information as they might give was based on so infirm a foundation. They had seen an odd looking girl disappear into one of the staterooms. They had really nothing more than a baseless conclusion to back up the assertion that the individual in question was disguised, or was the boy wanted by the police.

Of course, whatever Ruth said was best, and Helen would agree to it. The latter had learned long since that her chum was gifted with judgment beyond her years, and if she followed Ruth Fielding's lead she would not go far wrong.

Indeed, Helen began to admire her chum soon after Ruth first appeared at Jabez Potter's Red Mill, on the banks of the Lumano, near which Helen's father had built his all-year-around home. Ruth had come to the old Red Mill as a "charity child." At least, that is what miserly Jabez Potter considered her. Nor was he chary at first of saying that he had taken his grand-niece in because there was no one else to whom she could go.

Young as she then was, Ruth felt her position keenly. Had it not been for Aunt Alvira (who was nobody's relative, but everybody's aunt), whom the miller had likewise "taken in out of charity" to keep house for him and save the wages of a housekeeper, Ruth would never have been able to stay at the Red Mill. Her uncle's harshness and penurious ways mortified the girl, and troubled her greatly as time went on.

Ruth succeeded in finding her uncle's cashbox that had been stolen from him at the time a freshet carried away a part of the old mill. These introductory adventures are told in the initial volume of the series, called: "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill; or, Jacob Parloe's Secret."

Because he felt himself in Ruth's debt, her Uncle Jabez agreed to pay for her first year's tuition and support at a girls' boarding school to which Mr. Cameron was sending Helen. Helen was Ruth's dearest friend, and the chums, in the second volume, "Ruth Fielding at Briarwood Hall," entered school life hand in hand, making friends and rivals alike, and having adventures galore.

The third volume took Ruth and her friends to Snow Camp, a winter lodge in the Adirondack wilderness. The fourth tells of their summer adventures at Lighthouse Point on the Atlantic Coast. The fifth book deals with the exciting times the girls and their boy friends had with the cowboys at Silver Ranch, out in Montana. The sixth story is about Cliff Island and its really wonderful caves, and what was hidden in them. Number seven relates the adventures of a "safe and sane" Fourth of July at Sunrise Farm and the rescue of the Raby orphans. While "Ruth Fielding and the Gypsies," the eighth volume of the series, relates a very important episode in Ruth's career; for by restoring a valuable necklace to an aunt of one of her school friends she obtains a reward of five thousand dollars.

This money, placed to Ruth's credit in the bank by Mr. Cameron, made the girl of the Red Mill instantly independent of Uncle Jabez, who had so often complained of the expense Ruth was to him. Much to Aunt Alvira's sorrow, Uncle Jabez became more exacting and penurious when Ruth's school expenses ceased to trouble him.

"I could almost a-wish, my pretty, that you hadn't got all o' that money, for Jabez Potter was l'arnin' to let go of a dollar without a-squeezin' all the tail feathers off the eagle that's onto it," said the rheumatic, little, old woman. "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! It's nice for you to have your own livin' pervided for, Ruthie. But it's awful for Jabez Potter to get so selfish and miserly again."

Aunt Alvira had said this to the girl of the Red Mill just before Ruth started for Briarwood Hall at the opening of her final term at that famous school. In the story immediately preceding the present narrative, "Ruth Fielding in Moving Pictures; Or, Helping the Dormitory Fund," Ruth and her

school chums were much engaged in that modern wonder, the making of “movie” films. Ruth herself had written a short scenario and had had it accepted by Mr. Hammond, president of the Alectrion Film Corporation, when one of the school dormitories was burned. To help increase the fund for a new structure, the girls all desired to raise as much money as possible.

Ruth was inspired to write a second scenario – a five-reel drama of schoolgirl life – and Mr. Hammond produced it for the benefit of the Hall. “The Heart of a Schoolgirl” made a big hit and brought Ruth no little fame in her small world.

With Helen and the other girls who had been so close to her during her boarding school life, Ruth Fielding had now graduated from Briarwood Hall. Nettie Parsons and her Aunt Rachel had invited the girl of the Red Mill and Helen Cameron to go South for a few weeks following their graduation; and the two chums were now on their way to meet Mrs. Rachel Parsons and Nettie at Old Point Comfort. And from this place their trip into Dixie would really begin.

Ruth had stated positively her belief that the odd looking girl they had seen going into the stateroom numbered forty-eight was the disguised boy the police were after. But belief is not conviction, after all. They had no proof of the identity of the person in question.

“So, why should we interfere?” said Ruth, quietly. “We don’t know the circumstances. Perhaps he’s only accused.”

“I wish we could have seen his face,” said Helen. “I’d like to know what kind of looking girl he made. Remember when Curly Smith dressed up in Ann Hick’s old frock and hat that time?”

“Yes,” said Ruth, smiling. “But Curly looks like a girl when he’s dressed that way. If his hair were long and he learned to walk better – ”

“That girl we saw going into the stateroom was about Curly’s size,” said Helen reflectively.

“Poor Curly!” said Ruth. “I hope he is not in any serious trouble. It would really break his grandmother’s heart if he went wrong.”

“I suppose she does love him,” observed Helen. “But she is so awfully strict with him that I wonder the boy doesn’t run away again. He did when he was a little kiddie, you know.”

“Yes,” said Ruth, smiling. “His famous revolt against kilts and long curls. You couldn’t really blame him.”

However, the girls were not particularly interested in the fate of Henry Smith just then. They did not wish to lose any of the sights outside, and were just returning to the open deck when they saw a group of men hurrying through the saloon toward the bows. With the group Ruth and Helen recognized the purser who had viséd their tickets. One or two of the other men, though in citizen’s dress, were unmistakably policemen.

“Here’s the room,” said the purser, stopping suddenly, and referring to the list he carried. “I remember the person well. I couldn’t say he didn’t look like a young girl; but she – or he – was peculiar looking. Ah! the door’s locked.”

He rattled the knob. Then he knocked. Helen seized Ruth’s hand. “Oh, see!” she cried. “It is forty-eight.”

“I see it is. Poor fellow,” murmured Ruth.

“If she *is* a fellow.”

“And what will happen if he is a girl?” laughed Ruth.

“Won’t she be mad!” cried Helen.

“Or terribly embarrassed,” Ruth added.

“Here,” said one of the police officers, “he may be in there. By your lief, Purser,” and he suddenly put his knee against the door below the lock, pressed with all his force, and the door gave way with a splintering of wood and metal.

The officer plunged into the room, his comrades right behind him. Quite a party of spectators had gathered in the saloon to watch. But there was nobody in the stateroom.

“The bird’s flown, Jim,” said one policeman to another.

“Hullo!” said the purser. “What’s that in the berth?”

He picked up a dress, skirt, and hat. Ruth and Helen remembered that they were like those that the strange looking girl had worn. One of the policemen dived under the berth and brought forth a pair of high, fancy, laced shoes.

“He’s dumped his disguise here,” growled an officer. “Either he went ashore before the boat sailed, or he’s in his proper clothes again. Say! it would take us all night, Jim, to search this steamer.”

“And we’re not authorized to go to the Capes with her,” said the policeman who had been addressed as Jim. “We’d better go back and report, and let the inspector telegraph to Old Point a full description. Maybe the dicks there can nab the lad.”

The stateroom door was closed but could not be locked again. The purser and policemen went away, and the girls ran out on deck to see the police officers go down the ladder and into the launch.

They all did this without accident. Then the rope ladder was cast off and the launch chugged away, turning back toward the distant city.

The steamer had now passed Romer Light and Sandy Hook and was through the Ambrose Channel. The Scotland Lightship, courtesying to the rising swell, was just ahead. Ruth and Helen had never seen a lightship before and they were much interested in this drab, odd looking, short-masted vessel on which a crew lived month after month, and year after year, with only short respites ashore.

“I should think it would be dreadfully lonely,” Helen said, with reflection. “Just to tend the lights – and the fish, perhaps – eh?”

“I don’t suppose they have dances or have people come to afternoon tea,” giggled Ruth. “What do you expect?”

“Poor men! And no ladies around. Unless they have mermaids visit them,” and Helen chuckled too. “Wouldn’t it be fun to hire a nice big launch – a whole party of us Briarwood girls, for instance – and sail out there and go aboard that lightship? Wouldn’t the crew be surprised to see us?”

“Maybe,” said Ruth seriously, “they wouldn’t let us aboard. Maybe it’s against the rules. Or perhaps they only select men who are misanthropes, or women-haters, to tend lightships.”

“*Are* there such things as women-haters?” demanded Helen, big-eyed and innocent looking. “I thought *they* were fabled creatures – like – like mermaids, for instance.”

“Goodness! Do you think, Helen Cameron, that every man you meet is going to fall on his knees to you?”

“No-o,” confessed Helen. “That is, not unless I push him a little, weeny bit! And that reminds me, Ruthie. You ought to see the great bunch of roses Tom had the gardener cut yesterday to send to some girl. Oh, a barrel of ’em!”

“Indeed?” asked Ruth, a faint flush coming into her cheek. “Has Tom a crush on a new girl? I thought that Hazel Gray, the movie queen, had his full and complete attention?”

“How you talk!” cried Helen. “I suppose Tom will have a dozen flames before he settles down –”

Ruth suddenly burst into laughter. She knew she had been foolish for a moment.

“What nonsense to talk so about a boy in a military school!” she cried. “Why! he’s only a boy yet.”

“Yes, I know,” sighed Helen, speaking of her twin reflectively. “He’s merely a child. Isn’t it funny how much older we are than Tom is?”

“Goodness me!” gasped Ruth, suddenly seizing her chum by the arm.

“O-o-o! ouch!” responded Helen. “What a grip you’ve got, Ruth! What’s the matter with you?”

“See there!” whispered Ruth, pointing.

She had turned from the rail. Behind them, and only a few feet away, was the row of staterooms of which their own was one. Near by was a passage from the outer deck to the saloon, and from the doorway of this passage a person was peeping in a sly and doubtful way.

“Goodness!” whispered Helen. “Can – can it be?”

The figure in the doorway was lean and tall. Its gown hung about its frame as shapelessly as though the frock had been hung upon a clothespole! The face of the person was turned from the two girls; but Ruth whispered:

“It’s that boy they were looking for.”

“Oh, Ruth! Can it be possible?” Helen repeated.

“See the short hair?”

“Of course!”

“Oh!”

The Unknown had turned swiftly and disappeared into the passage. “Come on!” cried Helen. “Let’s see where he goes to.”

Ruth was nothing loath. Although she would not have told anybody of their discovery, she was very curious. If the disguised boy had left his first disguise in stateroom forty-eight, he had doubly misled his pursuers, for he was still in women’s clothing.

“Oh, dear me!” whispered Helen, as the two girls crowded into the doorway, each eager to be first. “I feel just like a regular detective.”

“How do you know how a regular detective feels?” demanded Ruth, giggling. “Those detectives who came aboard just now did not look as though they felt very comfortable. And one of them chewed tobacco!”

“Horrors!” cried Helen. “Then I feel like the detective of fiction. I am sure *he* never chews tobacco.”

“There! there she is!” breathed Ruth, stopping at the exit of the passage where they could see a good portion of the saloon.

“Come on! we mustn’t lose sight of her,” said Helen, with determination.

The awkward figure of the supposedly disguised boy was marching up the saloon and the girls almost ran to catch up with it.

“Do you suppose he will *dare* go to room forty-eight again?” whispered Ruth.

“And like enough they are watching that room.”

“Well – see there!”

The person they were following suddenly wheeled around and saw them. Ruth and Helen were so startled that they stopped, too, and stared in return. The face of the person in which they were so interested was a rather grim and unpleasant face. The cheeks were hollow, the short hair hung low on the forehead and reached only to the collar of the jacket behind. There were two deep wrinkles in the forehead over the high arched nose. Although the person had on no spectacles, the girls were positive that the eyes that peered at them were near-sighted.

“Why we should refer to her as *she*, when without doubt she is a *he*, I do not know,” said Helen, in a whisper, to Ruth.

The Unknown suddenly walked past them and sought a seat on one of the divans. The girls sat near, where they could keep watch of her, and they discussed quite seriously what they should do.

“I wish I could hear its voice,” whispered Ruth. “Then we might tell something more about it.”

“But we heard him speak on the dock – don’t you remember?”

“Oh, yes! when he almost knocked that poor colored man down.”

“Yes. And his voice was just a squeal then,” said Helen. “He tried to disguise it, of course.”

“While now,” added Ruth, chuckling, “he is as silent as the Sphinx.”

The stranger was busy, just the same. A shabby handbag had been opened and several pamphlets and folders brought forth. The near-sighted eyes were made to squint nervously into first one of these folders and then another, and finally there were several laid out upon the seat about the Unknown.

Suddenly the Unknown looked up and caught the two chums staring frankly in the direction of “his, her, or its” seat. Red flamed into the sallow cheeks, and gathering up the folders hastily, the

person crammed them into the bag and then started up to make her way aft. But Ruth had already seen the impoliteness of their actions.

“Do let us go away, Helen,” she said. “We have no right to stare so.”

She drew Helen down the saloon on the starboard side; it seems that the Unknown stalked down the saloon on the other. The chums and the strange individual rounded the built-up stairwell of the saloon at the same moment and came face to face again.

“Well, I want to know!” exclaimed the Unknown suddenly, in a viperish voice. “What do you girls mean? Are you following me around this boat? And what for, I’d like to know?”

“There!” murmured Ruth, with a sigh. “The worm has turned. We’re in for it, Helen – and we deserve it!”

CHAPTER III – THE BOY IN THE MOONLIGHT

A mistake could scarcely be made in the sex of the comical looking individual at whom the chums had been led to stare so boldly, when once they heard the voice. That shrill, sharp tone could never have come from a male throat. Now, too, the Unknown drew a pair of spectacles from her bag, adjusted them, and glared at Ruth and Helen.

“I want to know,” repeated the woman sternly, “what you mean by following me around this boat?”

The chums were tongue-tied in their embarrassment for the moment, but Helen managed to blurt out: “We – we didn’t know – ”

She was on the verge of making a bad matter worse, by saying that they didn’t know the lady was a lady! But Ruth broke in with:

“Oh, I beg your pardon, I am sure. We did not mean to offend you. Won’t you forgive us, if you think we were rude? I am sure we did not intend to be.”

It would have been hard for most people to resist Ruth’s mildness and her pleading smile. This person with the spectacles and the short hair was not moved by the girl of the Red Mill at all. Later Ruth and Helen understood why not.

“I don’t want any more of your impudence!” the stern woman said. “Go away and leave me alone. I’d like to have the training of all such girls as you. *I’d* teach you what’s what!”

“And I believe she would,” gasped Helen, as she and Ruth almost ran back up to the saloon deck again. “Goodness! she is worse than Miss Brokaw ever thought of being – and we thought *her* pretty sharp at times.”

“I wonder what and who the woman is,” Ruth murmured. “I am glad she is nobody whom I have to know.”

“Hope we have seen the last of the hateful old thing!”

But they had not. As the girls walked forward through the saloon and approached the spot where they had sat watching the mysterious woman with the short hair and the shorter temper, a youth got up from one of the seats and strolled out upon the deck ahead of them. Ruth started, and turned to look at Helen.

“My dear!” she said. “Did you see *that*?”

“Don’t point out any other mysteries to me – please!” cried Helen. “We’ll get into a worse pickle.”

“But did you see that boy?” insisted Ruth.

“No. I’m not looking for boys.”

“Neither am I,” Ruth returned. “But I could not help seeing how much that one resembled Curly Smith.”

“Dear me! You certainly have Henry Smith on the brain,” cried Helen.

“Well, I can’t help thinking of the poor boy. I hope we shall hear from his grandmother again. I am going to write and mail the letter just as soon as we reach Old Point Comfort.”

The girls had walked slowly on, past the seat where the odd looking woman whom they had watched had sat down to examine the contents of her handbag. There were few other passengers about, for as the evening closed in almost everybody had sought the open deck.

Suddenly, from behind them, came a sound which seemed to be a cross between a steam whistle gone mad and the clucking of an excited hen. Ruth and Helen turned in amazement and saw the lank, mannish figure of the strange woman flying up the saloon.

“Stop them! Come back! My ticket!” were the words which finally became coherent as the strange individual reached the vicinity of the girl chums. An officer who was passing through happened to be right beside the two girls when the excited woman reached them.

She apparently had the intention of seizing hold upon Ruth and Helen, and the friends, startled, shrank back. The ship's officer promptly stepped in between the girls and the excited person with the short hair.

"Wait a moment, madam," he said sharply. "What is it all about?"

"My ticket!" cried the short-haired woman, glaring through her spectacles at Ruth and Helen.

"Your ticket?" said the officer. "What about it?"

"It isn't there!" and she pointed tragically to the seat on which she had previously rested.

"Did you leave it there?" queried the officer, guessing at the reason for her excitement.

"I just did, sir!" snapped the stern woman.

"Your ticket for your trip to Norfolk?"

"No, it isn't. It's my ticket for my railroad trip from Norfolk to Charleston. I had it folded in one of those Southern Railroad Company's folders. And now it isn't in my bag."

"Well?" said the officer calmly. "I apprehend that you left the folder on this seat – or think you did?"

"I know I did," declared the excited woman. "Those girls were following me around in a most impudent way; and they were right here when I got up and forgot that folder."

"The inference being, then," went on the officer, "that they took the folder and the ticket?"

"Yes, sir, I am convinced they did just that," declared the woman, glaring at the horrified Ruth and Helen.

Said the latter, angrily: "Why, the mean old thing! Who ever heard the like?"

"Oh, I know girls through and through!" snapped the strange woman. "I should think I ought to by this time – after fifteen years of dealing with the minxes. I could see that those two were sly and untrustworthy, the instant I saw them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Nasty cat!" muttered Helen.

The officer was not greatly impressed. "Have you any real evidence connecting these young ladies with the loss of your ticket?" he asked.

"I say it's stolen!" cried the sharp-voiced one.

"And it may, instead, have been picked up, folder and all, by a quite different party. Perhaps the purser already has your lost ticket –"

At that moment the purser himself appeared, coming up the saloon. Behind him were two of the under stewards burdened with magnificent bunches of roses. A soft voice appealed at Ruth's elbow:

"If missy jes' let me take her stateroom key, den all dem roses be 'ranged in dar mos' skillful – ya-as'm; mos' skillful."

"Why! did you ever!" gasped Helen, amazed.

"Those are never for *us*?" cried Ruth.

"You are Miss Cameron?" asked the smiling purser of Ruth's chum. "These flowers came at the last moment by express for you and your friend. In getting under way they were overlooked; but the head stewardess opened the box and rearranged the roses, and I am sure they have not been hurt. Here is the card – Mr. Thomas Cameron's compliments."

"Oh, the dear!" cried Helen, clasping her hands.

"*Those* were the roses you thought he sent to Hazel Gray," whispered Ruth sharply.

"So they are!" cried Helen. "What a dunce I was. Of course, old Tom would not forget us. He's a good, good boy!"

She ran ahead to the stateroom. Ruth turned to see what had happened to the woman who thought they had taken her railroad ticket. The deck officer had turned her over to the purser and it was evident that the latter was in for an unpleasant quarter of an hour.

The roses seemed fairly to fill the stateroom, there were so many of them. The girls preferred to arrange them themselves; so the three porters left after having been tipped.

The chums opened the blind again so that they could look out across the water at the Jersey shore. Sandy Hook was now far behind them. Long Branch and the neighboring seaside resorts were likewise passed.

The girls watched the shore with its ever varying scenes until past six o'clock and many of the passengers had gone into the dining saloon. Ruth and Helen finally went, too. They saw nothing of the unpleasant woman whose ire had been so roused against them; but after they came up from dinner, and the orchestra was playing, and the Brigantine Buoy was just off the port bow, the girls saw somebody else who began to interest them deeply.

The moon was coming up, and its silvery rays whitened everything upon deck. The girls sat for a while in the open stern deck watching the water and the lights. It was very beautiful indeed.

It was Helen who first noticed the figure near, with his back to them and with his head upon the arm that rested on the steamer's rail. She nudged Ruth.

"See him?" she whispered. "That's the boy who you said looked like Henry Smith. See his curly hair?"

"Oh, Helen!" gasped Ruth, a thought stabbing her suddenly. "Suppose it is?"

"Suppose it is what?"

"Suppose it *should* be Curly whom the police were after? You know, that dressed-up boy – if it was he we saw on the dock – had curly hair."

"So he had! I forgot that when we were trailing that queer old maid," chuckled Helen.

"This is no laughing matter, dear," whispered Ruth, watching the curly-haired boy closely. "Having gotten rid of his disguise, there was no reason why that boy should not stay aboard the steamboat."

"No; I suppose not," admitted Helen, rather puzzled.

"And if it is Curly –"

"Oh, goodness me! we don't even know that Henry Smith has run away!" exclaimed Helen.

Instantly the boy near them started. He rose and clung to the rail for a moment. But he did not look back at the two girls.

Ruth had clutched Helen's arm and whispered: "Hush!" She was not sure whether the boy had heard or not. At any rate, he did not look at them, but walked slowly away. They did not see his face at all.

CHAPTER IV – THE CAPE OF VIRGINIA

Ruth and Helen did not think of going to bed until long after Absecon Light, off Atlantic City, was passed. They watched the long-spread lights of the great seaside resort until they disappeared in the distance and Ludlum Beach Light twinkled in the west.

The music of the orchestra came to their ears faintly; but above all was the murmur and jar of the powerful machinery that drove the ship. This had become a monotone that rather got on the girls' nerves.

"Oh, dear! let's go to bed," said Helen plaintively. "I *don't* see why those engines have to pound so. It sounds like the tramping of a herd of elephants."

"Did you ever hear a herd of elephants tramping?" asked Ruth, laughing.

"No; but I can imagine how they would sound," said Helen. "At any rate, let's go to bed."

They did not see the curly-haired boy; but as they went in to the ladies' lavatory on their side of the deck, they came face to face with the queer woman with whom they had already had some trouble.

She glared at the two girls so viperishly that Helen would never have had the courage to accost her. Not so Ruth. She ignored the angry gaze of the lady and said:

"I hope you have found your ticket, ma'am?"

"No, I haven't found it – and you know right well I haven't," declared the short-haired woman.

"Surely, you do not believe that my friend and I took it?" Ruth said, flushing a little, yet holding her ground. "We would have no reason for doing such a thing, I assure you."

"Oh, I don't know what you did it for!" exclaimed the woman harshly. "With all my experience with you and your kind I have never yet been able to foretell what a rattlepated schoolgirl will do, or her reason for doing it."

"I am sorry if your experience has been so unfortunate with schoolgirls," Ruth said. "But please do not class my friend and me with those you know – who you intimate would steal. We did not take your ticket, ma'am."

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Helen, under her breath.

The woman tossed her head and her pale, blue eyes seemed to emit sparks. "You can't tell me! You can't tell me!" she declared. "I know you girls. You've made me trouble enough, I should hope. I would believe anything of you —*anything!*"

"Do come away, Ruth," whispered Helen; and Ruth seeing that there was no use talking with such a set and vindictive person, complied.

"But we don't want her going about the boat and telling people that we stole her ticket," Ruth said, with indignation. "How will that sound? Some persons may believe her."

"How are you going to stop her?" Helen demanded. "Muzzle her?"

"That might not be a bad plan," Ruth said, beginning to smile again. "Oh! but she *did* make me so angry!"

"I noticed that for once our mild Ruth quite lost her temper," Helen said, delightedly giggling. "Did me good to hear you stand up to her."

"I wonder who she is and what sort of girls she teaches – for of course she *is* a teacher," said Ruth.

"In a reform school, I should think," Helen said. "Her opinion of schoolgirls is something awful. It's worse than Miss Brokaw's."

"Do you suppose that fifteen years of teaching can make any woman hate girls as she certainly does?" Ruth said reflectively. "There must be something really wrong with her –"

"There's something wrong with her looks, that's sure," Helen agreed. "She is the dowdiest thing I ever saw."

“Her way of dressing has nothing to do with it. It is the hateful temper she shows. I am afraid that poor woman has had a very hard time with her pupils.”

“There you go!” cried Helen. “Beginning to pity her! I thought you would not be sensible for long. Oh, Ruthie Fielding! you would find an excuse for a man’s murdering his wife and seven children.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” Ruth said. “Of course, he would have to be insane to do it.”

They returned to their stateroom. It was somewhat ghostly, Helen thought, along the narrow deck now. Ruth fumbled at the lock for some time.

“Are you sure you have the right room?” Helen whispered.

“I’ve got the right room, for I know the number; but I’m not sure about the key,” giggled Ruth. “Oh! here it opens.”

They went in. Ruth remembered where the electric light bulb was and snapped on the light. “There! isn’t this cozy?” she asked.

“‘Snug as a bug in a rug,’” quoted Helen. “Goodness! how sharp your elbow is, dear!”

“And that was my foot you stepped on,” complained Ruth.

“I believe we’ll have to take turns undressing,” Helen said. “One stay outside on the deck till the other gets into bed.”

“And we’ve got to draw lots for the upper berth. What a climb!”

“It makes me awfully dizzy to look down from high places,” giggled Helen. “I don’t believe I’d dare to climb into that upper berth.”

“Now, Miss Cameron!” cried Ruth, with mock sternness. “We’ll settle this thing at once. No cheating. Here are two matches – ”

“Matches! Where did you get matches?”

“Out of my bag. In this tiny box. I have never traveled without matches since the time we girls were lost in the snow up in the woods that time. Remember?”

“I should say I do remember our adventures at Snow Camp,” sighed Helen. “But I never would have remembered to carry matches, just the same.”

“Now, I break the head off this one. Do you see? One is now shorter than the other. I put them together —*so*. Now I hide them in my hand. You pull one, Helen. If you pull the longer one you get the lower berth.”

“I get something else, too, don’t I?” said Helen.

“What?”

“The match!” laughed the other girl. “There! Oh, dear me! it’s the short one.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, dear,” cried Ruth, at once sympathetic. “If you really dread getting into the upper berth – ”

“Be still, you foolish thing!” cried Helen, hugging her. “If we were going to the guillotine and I drew first place, you’d offer to have your dear little neck chopped first. I know you.”

The next moment Helen began on something else. “Oh, me! oh, my! what a pair of little geese we are, Ruthie.”

“What about?” demanded her chum.

“Why! see this button in the wall? And we were scrambling all over the place for the electric light bulb. Can’t we punch it on?” and she tried the button tentatively.

“Now you’ve done it!” groaned Ruth.

“Done what?” demanded Helen in alarm. “I guess that hasn’t anything to do with the electric lights. Is it the fire alarm?”

“No. But it costs money every time you punch that button. You are as silly as poor, little, flaxen-haired Amy Gregg was when she came to Briarwood Hall and did not know how to manipulate the electric light buttons.”

“But what have I *done*?” demanded Helen. “Why will it cost me money?”

Ruth calmly reached down the ice-water pitcher from its rack. “You’ll know in a minute,” she said. “There! hear it?”

A faint tinkling approached. It came along the deck outside and Helen pushed back the blind a little way to look out. Immediately a soft, drawling voice spoke.

“D’jew ring fo’ ice-water, missy? I got it right yere.”

Ruth already had found a dime and she thrust it out with the pitcher. It was their own particular “colored gemmen,” as Helen gigglingly called him. She dodged back out of sight, for she had removed her shirtwaist. He filled the pitcher and went tinkling away along the deck with a pleasant, “I ‘ank ye, missy. Goo’ night.”

“I declare!” cried Helen. “He’s one of the genii or a bottle imp. He appears just when you want him, performs his work, and silently disappears.”

“That man will be rich before we get to Old Point Comfort,” sighed Ruth, who was of a frugal disposition.

They closed the blind again, and a little later the lamp on the deck outside was extinguished. The girls had said their prayers, and now Helen, with much hilarity, “shinnied up” to the berth above, kicking her night slippers off as she plunged into it.

“Good-bye – if I don’t see you again,” she said plaintively. “You may have to call the fire department with their ladders, to get me down.”

Ruth snapped off the light, and then registered her getting into bed by a bump on her head against the lower edge of the upper berth.

“Oh, my, Helen! You have the best of it after all. Oh, how that hurt!”

“M-m-m-m!” from Helen. So quickly was she asleep!

But Ruth could not go immediately to Dreamland. There had been too much of an exciting nature happening.

She lay and thought of Curly Smith, and of the disguised boy, and of the obnoxious school teacher who had accused her and Helen of robbing her. The odor of Tom’s roses finally became so oppressive that she got up to open the blind again for more air. She again struck her head. It was impossible to remember that berth edge every time she got up and down.

As she stepped lightly upon the floor in her bare feet she heard a stealthy footstep outside. It brought Ruth to an immediate halt, her hand stretched out toward the blind. Through the interstices of the blind she could see that the white moonlight flooded the deck. Stealthily she drew back the blind and peered out.

The person on the deck had halted almost opposite the window. Ruth knew now that the steamer must be well across the Five Fathom Bank, with the Delaware Lightship behind them and the Fenwick Lightship not far ahead. To the west was the wide entrance to Delaware Bay, and the land was now as far away from them as it would be at any time during the trip.

She peered out quietly. There stood the curly-haired boy again, leaning on the rail, and looking wistfully off to the distant shore.

Was it Henry Smith? Was he the boy who had come aboard the boat in girl’s clothes? And if so, what would he do when the boat docked at Old Point Comfort and the detectives appeared? They would probably have a good description of the boy wanted, and could pick him out of the crowd going ashore.

Ruth was almost tempted to speak to the boy – to whisper to him. Had she been sure it was Curly she would have done so, for she knew him so well. But, as before, his face was turned away from her.

He moved on, and Ruth softly slid back the blind and stole to bed again, for the third time bumping her head. “My! if this keeps on, I’ll be all lumps and hollows like an outline map of the Rocky Mountains,” she whimpered, and then cuddled down under the sheet and lay looking out of the open window.

The sea air blew softly in and cooled her flushed cheeks. The odor of the roses was not so oppressive, and after a time she dropped to sleep. When she awoke it was because of the change in the temperature some time before dawn. The moon was gone; but there was a faint light upon the water.

Helen moved in the berth above. "Hullo, up there!" whispered Ruth.

"Hullo, down there!" was the quick reply. "What ever made me wake up so early?"

"Because you want to get up early," replied Ruth, this time sliding out of her berth so adroitly that she did *not* bump her head.

Helen came tumbling down, skinning her elbow and landing with a thump on the floor. "Gracious to goodness – and all hands around!" she ejaculated. "Talk about sleeping on a shelf in a Pullman car! Why, that's 'Home Sweet Home' to *this*. I came near to breaking my neck."

"Come on! scramble into your clothes," said Ruth, already at the wash basin.

Helen peered out. "Why – oh, my!" she said, shivering and holding the lacy neck of her gown about her. "It's da-ark yet. It must be midnight."

"It is ten minutes to four o'clock," said Ruth promptly. She had studied the route and knew it exactly. "That is Chincoteague Island Light yonder. That's where those cunning little ponies that Madge Steele's father had at Sunrise Farm came from."

"Wha-at?" yawned Helen. "Did they come from the light?"

"No, goosy! from the island. They are bred there."

Ten minutes later the chums were out on the open deck. They raced forward to see if they could see the sun. His face was still below the sea, but a flush along the edge of the horizon announced his coming.

"Oh, see yonder!" cried Helen. "See the shore! How near! And the long line of beaches. What's that white line outside the yellow sand?"

"The surf," Ruth said. "And that must be Hog Island Light. How faint it is. The sun is putting it out."

"It's a long way ahead."

"Yes. We won't pass that till almost six o'clock. Oh, Helen! there comes the sun."

"What's that?" asked Helen, suddenly seizing her chum's wrist. "Did you hear it?"

"That splash? The men are washing decks."

"It is a man overboard!" murmured Helen.

"More likely a big fish jumping," said the practical Ruth.

The girls hung over the rail, looking shoreward, and tried in the uncertain light to see if there was any object floating on the water. If Helen expected to see a black spot like the head of a swimmer, she was disappointed.

But she did see – and so did Ruth – a lazy fishing smack drifting by on the tide. They could almost have thrown a stone aboard of her.

There seemed to be a little excitement aboard the smack. Men ran to and fro and leaned over the rail. Then the girls thought they saw the smackmen spear something, or possibly somebody, with a boathook and haul their prize aboard.

"I believe somebody did fall overboard from this steamer, and those fishermen have picked him up," Helen declared.

The girls watched the sunrise and the shore line for another hour or more and then went in to breakfast. When they came back to the open deck the steamer was flying past the coast of the lower Peninsula, and Cape Charles Lightship courtesied to her on the swells.

Far, far in the distance they saw the staff of the Cape Henry Light. The steamer soon turned her prow to pass between these two points of land, known to seamen as the Capes of Virginia, which mark the entrance to Chesapeake Bay.

Their fair trip down the coast from New York was almost ended and the chums began to pick up their things in the stateroom and repack their bags.

CHAPTER V – THE NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT

“Do you suppose Nettie and her aunt have arrived, Ruth?”

“I really don’t,” Ruth Fielding said, as she and her chum stood on the upper deck again and watched the shore which they were approaching so rapidly.

“Goodness! won’t you feel funny going up to that big, sprawling hotel alone?”

“No, dear. I sha’n’t be alone,” laughed Ruth. “You will be with me, won’t you?”

Helen merely pinched her for answer.

“The rooms are engaged for us, you know,” Ruth assured her chum. “Mrs. Parsons knew she might be delayed by business in Washington and that we would possibly reach the hotel first. They have our names and all we have to do is to present her card.”

“Fine! I leave it all to you,” agreed Helen.

“Of course you will. You always do,” said Ruth drily. “You certainly are one of the fortunate ones in this world, Helen, dear.”

“How am I?”

“Because,” Ruth said, laughing, “all you ever will do in any emergency will be to roll those pretty eyes of yours and look helpless, and *somebody* will come to your rescue.”

“Lucky me, then!” sighed her friend. “How green the grass is on the shore, Ruth – and how blue the water. Isn’t this one lovely morning?”

“And a beautiful place we are going to. That’s the fort yonder – the largest in the United States, I shouldn’t wonder.”

As the steamer drew in closer to the dock those passengers who were not going on to Norfolk got their hand baggage together and pressed toward the forward lower deck, from which they would land at the Point. The girls followed suit; but as they came out of their stateroom there was the omnipresent colored man, in his porter’s uniform now, ready to take the bags.

Ruth and Helen let him take the bags, though they were very well able to carry them, for he was insistent. The stewardess – a comfortable looking old “aunty” in starched cap and apron – was likewise bobbing courtesies to them as they went through the saloon. Helen’s ready purse drew the colored population of that boat as a honey-pot does bees.

As they descended to the lower deck, suddenly the queer looking school teacher, with the short hair and funny clothes, faced them. The purser had evidently been trying to pacify her, but now he gave it up.

“You mean to tell me that you won’t demand to have these girls examined —*searched*?” cried the angry woman. “They may have taken my ticket for fun, but it’s a serious matter and they are now afraid to give it up. I know ’em – root and branch!”

“Do you *know* these two young ladies?” demanded the purser, in surprise.

“Yes; I know their kind. I have been teaching girls just like ’em for fifteen years. They’re up to all kinds of mischief.”

“Oh, madam!” cried the purser, “that is strong language. I cannot hold these young ladies on your say-so. You have no evidence. Nor do I believe they have your ticket in their possession.”

“Of course you’d take their side!” sniffed the woman.

“I am on the side of innocence always. If you care to get into trouble by speaking to the police, you will probably find two policemen waiting on the dock as we go ashore. They are after that disguised boy who came aboard.”

The woman tossed her head and strode away, after glaring again at the embarrassed girls. The purser said, gently:

"I am very sorry, young ladies, that you have been annoyed by that person. And I am glad that you did not let the offence make *us* any more trouble. Of course, she had no right to speak of you and to you as she has.

"I believe she is to be pitied, however. I learn that she is going on a trip South for her health, after a particularly arduous year's work. She is, as she intimates, a teacher in a big girl's boarding school in New England. She is probably not a favorite with her pupils at best, and is now undoubtedly broken down nervously and not quite responsible for what she says and does."

Then the purser continued, smiling: "Perhaps you can imagine that her pupils have not tried to make her life pleasant. I have a daughter about your age who goes to such a school, and I know from her that sometimes the girls are rather thoughtless of an instructor's comfort – if they dislike her."

"Oh, that is true enough, I expect," Ruth admitted. "See how they used to treat little Picolet!" she added to Helen.

"I guess *no* girl would fall in love with this horrid creature who says we stole her ticket."

"She is not of a lovable disposition, that is sure," agreed the purser. "Her name is Miss Miggs. I hope you will not see her again."

"Oh! you don't suppose she will try to make trouble for us ashore?" Ruth cried.

"I will see that she does not. I will speak to the officers who I expect are awaiting the boat's arrival. They have already communicated with us by wireless about that boy."

"Wireless!" cried Helen. "And we didn't know you had it aboard. I certainly would have thanked Tom for those roses. And then, Ruth! Just think of telegraphing by wireless!"

"Sorry you missed that, young ladies. The instrument is in Room Seventy," said the purser, bustling away.

"Too late! too late! the villain cried!" murmured Helen. "We missed that."

"Never mind," said Ruth, smiling. "If we go back to New York by boat we can hang around the wireless telegraph room all the time and you can send messages to all your friends."

"No I can't," said Helen shortly.

"Why not?"

"Because I won't have any money left by that time," Helen declared ruefully. "Goodness! how much it does cost to travel."

"It does, I guess, if you practise such generosity as you have practised," said Ruth. "Do use a little judgment, Helen. You tip recklessly, and you buy everything you see."

"No," declared her chum. "There's one thing I've seen that I wouldn't buy if it was selling as cheap as 'two bits,' as these folks say down here."

"What's that?" asked Ruth, with a laugh.

"That old maid school marm from New England," Helen replied promptly.

"Poor thing!" commented Ruth.

"There you go! Pitying her already! How do you know that she won't try to have us arrested?"

"Goodness! we'll hope not," said Ruth, as they surged toward the gangway with the rest of the disembarking passengers, the boat having already docked.

The crowd came out into the sunshine of a perfect morning upon a bustling dock. There was a goodly crowd from the hotels to see the newcomers land. Some of the passengers were met by friends; but neither Nettie Parsons nor her aunt were in sight.

The porter who carried the girls' bags, however, handed them over to a hotel porter and evidently said a good word for them to that functionary; for he was very attentive and led the chums out of the crowd toward the broad veranda of the hotel front.

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