

Roy Lillian Elizabeth

# Girl Scouts at Dandelion Camp



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## Содержание

CHAPTER ONE – THE DANDELION PATROL	5
CHAPTER TWO – AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION	10
CHAPTER THREE – THE OLD CAMPSITE	16
CHAPTER FOUR – BEGINNING THEIR CAMP LIFE	21
CHAPTER FIVE – RUTH MEETS WITH DIFFICULTIES	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

# Lillian Elizabeth Roy

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### CHAPTER ONE – THE DANDELION PATROL

“Dear me, I never saw so many old dandelions in my life!” exclaimed Juliet Lee, as she tugged mightily at a stubborn root.

“Seems to me there are ten new weeds ready to spring up the moment we pull an old one out,” grumbled Ruth Bentley, standing up to straighten her aching back.

“Forty-six for me! I’ll soon have my hundred roots out for the day!” exulted Elizabeth Lee, Juliet’s twin sister. As she spoke, she shook a clod of loose earth from a large dandelion root, and threw the forty-sixth plant into a basket standing beside her.

“You handled that root exactly as an Indian would a scalp before he ties it to his belt,” laughed Joan Allison, another girl in the group of four so busily at work weeding a vast expanse of lawn.

“Oh, me! I don’t b’lieve we *ever* will earn enough money this way to pay our expenses in a Girls’ Camp!” sighed Ruth, watching her companions work while she stood and complained. “Doesn’t it seem foolish to waste these lovely summer days in weeding Mrs. Vernon’s lawn, when we might be having glorious sport in a Girl Scouts’ Troop?”

“We’d never be admitted to a Patrol or Troop if we had to confess failure in pulling up little things like dandelions,” ventured Elizabeth, without raising her eyes from her task.

“There you go – preaching, as usual!” retorted Ruth.

“Well, anyway, Mrs. Vernon said it wasn’t so much what we did, or where we did it, as long as we always did the *best* we could; so I’m trying my best on these unfriendly weeds,” added Elizabeth, generally called Betty, for short.

“Pooh! Mrs. Vernon is an old preacher, too, and you copy her in everything just because you haven’t any mind of your own!” scorned Ruth, her face looking quite ugly for such a pretty girl.

Juliet, known familiarly as Julie, glanced over at her sister to see if Ruth’s rude words hurt. Seeing Betty as happy-faced as ever, she exchanged glances with Joan, who understood Ruth better than the girl understood herself.

To change the trend of the conversation, Joan now asked: “Has any one thought of a name for our club?”

“Yes, I proposed lots of them but Verny seemed to think they were meaningless. I suppose she prefers a Latin or Greek name,” Ruth jeered.

“Oh, not at all! She left it entirely to us to choose a name, but she thought we ought to select one that would fit,” hastily explained Joan.

“I’ve got one – guess what?” exclaimed Betty, sitting back, and hugging her knees as she smiled questioningly at her friends.

The other girls puckered their brows and guessed all sorts of names, some so ridiculous that a merry chorus of laughter pealed across the glen; but finally, Betty held up a hand in warning and shouted:

“Halt! Halt! if you keep on this way, we’ll never finish the weeds.”

“Give up, then!” responded her companions.

“Dandelion Troopy!” exulted Betty.

“Troopy – why that ‘y’ at the end?” queried Joan.

“Cause we can’t be a regular ‘Troop,’ you know, while we have only four members – Verny said the Scout Manual says so. As most infant ideas end with a ‘y,’ I suggest that we end that way.”

“Oh, Betty! I’m sure you don’t want us to end there when we’ve but just begun,” laughed Julie.

Betty was about to explain her meaning when Ruth interrupted. “Good gracious! Haven’t we had enough of dandelions in this horrid job without reminding us forever of the work by calling ourselves by that name?”

“Well, I was thinking how pretty the name would look if Verny prints it on a board sign and paints yellow dandelions all about the words,” explained Betty, in an apologetic tone.

“It *would* look nice,” added Joan, picking up a blossom and studying it carefully.

“You know dandelions really are lovely! And they smell sweet, too. But they grow so freely, everywhere, that folks think they are weeds. Now they’d be considered wonderful if they were hard to cultivate,” said Betty, seriously.

“I fail to see beauty in the old things!” scorned Ruth.

“You fail to see beauty in lots of things, Ruth, and that’s where you lose the best part of living,” said a sweet voice from the pathway that skirted the lawn.

“Oh, Verny! When did you get back?” cried three of the girls. Ruth turned away her face and curled her lips rebelliously.

“Oh, some time ago, but I went indoors to see if the banker had his money ready for my scouts,” replied Mrs. Vernon, paying no attention to Ruth’s attitude.

“We were just talking of a name, Verny, and Betsy said she thought the name of ‘Dandelion’ was so appropriate,” explained Joan.

“Betty thought a signboard with the name and a wreath of the flowers painted on it would be awfully sweet,” added Julie, eagerly.

“And I say ‘Toad-stool Camp’ with a lot of fungus plants painted about it would be more appropriate for this Troop’s name!” sneered Ruth, wheeling around to face Mrs. Vernon. “We’re sick of the sight of dandelions.”

Understanding Ruth’s shortcomings so well, the girls paid no attention to this remark, but Mrs. Vernon said: “I came out to see if you were almost through with to-day’s work.”

“Seems as if we were awfully slow this afternoon, Verny, but we’ll dig all the faster now for having you here to boss us,” said Julie.

“It’s all because I stopped them to talk about a name,” admitted Betty.

“Well, we were glad of the recess,” laughed Joan.

“Come, come, then – let’s make up for lost time!” called Julie, falling to with a zeal never before demonstrated by her.

The other girls turned and also began digging furiously, in order to complete the number of roots they were supposed to sell at one time. Not a word was spoken for a few moments, but Ruth groaned about her backache, and sat up every few seconds to look at her dirt-smeared fingernails. Mrs. Vernon had to hide a smile and when she could control her voice, said:

“I’ll be going back to Vernon’s Bank, girls, but as soon as you are ready to cash in for the roots, go to the side porch. Then wash up in the lavatory and meet me on the front verandah, where we’ll have something cool to drink for such warm laborers.”

“Um-m! I know what! You always do treat us the best!” cried Joan.

“With such an incentive before us, I shouldn’t wonder but we’ll be there before you are ready,” added Julie, smacking her lips.

Mrs. Vernon laughed, then walked back to the house, and the girls dug and dug, without wasting any more time to grumble or talk. Even Ruth forgot her annoyances in the anticipation of having something good to eat and a cooling drink the moment she was through with her hundred weeds.

As usual, Betty completed her task before any of her companions, and Ruth said querulously: “I don’t see how you ever do it! Here I’ve worked as hard as any one but I only have sixty roots.”

“I’ll help you finish up so’s we can get to the house,” Betty offered generously. And Ruth accepted her help without thinking to thank her.

"I know why Ruth always falls behind," commented Joan. "Betty may be a 'prude' and a 'preacher' in Ruth's eyes, but she sure does persist in anything. I haven't heard her complain of, or shirk, a single thing since we began this Scout plan. Ruth sits and worries over everything before it happens, so she really makes her work hard from the moment she ever starts it."

"That's good logic, Joan," returned Julie. "Besides all that, I have watched Betty work, and she seems to *like* it! Haven't you ever noticed how fast and well you can do anything that you love to do?"

"You don't suppose I *love* to root out dandelions, do you?" demanded Betty, laughingly.

"Not exactly, but you try to see all the good points in them and that makes you overlook the horrid things," said Julie.

"Well, I wish Betty would show me the good points in a pan of potatoes," said Joan. "I have to peel the 'taters every day, and *I hate it!* Many a time I have tried to fool myself into believing I like them – but I just can't!"

The girls laughed heartily, and Julie added: "Next time you have to peel them, begin to sing or speak a piece – that works like magic, because it turns your thoughts to other things."

"There now! Ruth's hundred are ready, too!" said Betty, tossing the last few roots into the basket.

Mr. Vernon was paymaster, and always contrived to have bright new coins on hand with which to pay his laborers. To-day he counted out the correct wage for each girl, and then said:

"That lawn must be almost cleaned up, eh?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon! It's most discouraging!" cried Ruth.

"Yes – why?" asked Mr. Vernon, quizzically.

"Because we root out a place one day, and the next the young ones sprout up again."

"That looks as if you girls may bankrupt me before this contract is completed, eh?" laughed he.

"Come, girls! Don't waste your time in there with Uncle Verna when you might be sipping cool lemonade out here!" called Mrs. Vernon from the front of the house.

So the four girls hastily washed away all signs of earth from hands and faces, and joined their "Captain" on the verandah. Here they found waiting great wicker easy-chairs, and a table spread with goodies. In a few moments unpleasant work and dandelions were forgotten in the delectable pastime of eating fresh cake and drinking lemonade.

"What do *you* think of the name 'Dandelion Troop,' Verna?" asked Julie, when the first attack on the cake had subsided.

"I think it is most appropriate at present, but how will you feel about that name next year – or the next?"

"Now that's what I say! We'll grow so tired of it," added Ruth.

"But we don't think so!" argued Julie.

"Besides, we ought never to weary of the humble things that really start us in life. If dandelions mean our start to a real Scout Troop, we ought to be grateful and honor the weed," giggled Joan.

Then an animated discussion followed between the girls for and against the name, but finally the champions of "Dandelion" came forth the victors, and thereafter they wished to be known as "The Dandelion Troop."

"I suppose you girls know that we can't organize a regular Patrol until we have eight or more girls," said Mrs. Vernon, after the mimic christening of a dandelion with Betty as sponsor for the name took place.

"We know that, but you told us that the Handbook said we might be a club from any school or Y. W. C. A., and meet regularly until we had secured our needed number," added Joan, anxiously.

"Yes, that is true, but I think we had better continue with our little club as we are now, and study the ways and laws of the Scouts, before we try to increase our number to eight. You see, you had already planned to earn money for camping this summer before the Girl Scout Drive began; then you became enthusiastic over that.

“If I am to be your Captain, I, too, must study the plans, principles, and objects of the Organization, or I would be a poor Captain to guide you.”

“Does that mean we can’t call ourselves Girl Scouts, or anything else, until you’ve done training?” demanded Ruth.

“By no means! Dandelion Patrol can go right along and obey the laws of the Scouts, and perfect itself for admission to the Organization as soon as we prove we know enough to claim our membership,” explained Mrs. Vernon.

“But we won’t have to give up our camp idea for that, will we?” asked Joan, anxiously.

“No,” laughed Mrs. Vernon, while the other girls sighed in relief.

While the four girls are trudging homeward, you may like to hear how they came to be weeding Vernon’s lawn, and why they were so keen about starting a Girls’ Scout Patrol.

Julie and Betty were about thirteen years old, and were very popular with their friends. Their sister, May, who was about seventeen, kept house for the family, as the mother had been dead for several years. Besides May, there were Daddy Lee, John, the brother, who was twelve, and Eliza, the maid-of-all-work, who had been a fixture in the household since May was a baby.

Ruth Bentley was about fourteen, but she was an only child. Every whim was law to her doting mother and father, so it was small wonder that the girl was spoiled in many ways. But not past salvation, as you shall see. She had a lovely home quite near the Vernons’ place, with servants to do the work and wait upon her; thus indolence became one of her evil tendencies. When Ruth heard the Lee girls propose the forming of a Scout Patrol, she, too, yearned to become a member. Hence she had to weed dandelions for a test the same as the other girls did, but not without complaints and rebellion on her part. Mrs. Vernon paid no attention to her fault-finding, for she knew that if the girl persevered there would be less danger of her failing in other tests when the Patrol began on more interesting but more difficult tasks.

Joan Allison was also thirteen years of age, and a more sensible little person you would have difficulty in finding. She had three brothers younger than herself, but her parents could not afford a maid, so Joan helped with the house-work, while the boys did the chores about the place.

The Vernons’ house, on the outskirts of the town, was the handsomest place in the township. There were acres of woodland and meadows at the back, and a velvety lawn that sloped from the front of the house down to the stream that was the boundary line of the estate.

The Vernons had had a son who enlisted in the Aviation Service at the beginning of the War in Europe, but he had met death soon after his initial flight on the battle lines. Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had always taken an interest in the children living in their neighborhood, but after Myles’ death they tried to forget their loss by closer companionship with the young people in the small town.

Mrs. Vernon had heard of and seen the splendid work done by Girl Scouts, and she decided to train a group to join the Organization. Thus it came about that the four girls who were anxious, also, to become Scouts, were the first members in the Dandelion Patrol to be started by Mrs. Vernon.

To try out their patience and powers of endurance, as well as to have them earn money for their simple camp-equipment, Mrs. Vernon suggested that they weed dandelions at a rate of twenty cents a hundred. This test taught the girls to appreciate the value expressed in a dime – for it meant just that much service rendered.

School would soon close for the summer, and the girls hoped by that time to have enough money earned and saved to buy the second-hand tent and camp-outfit a friend of May’s had offered for sale. Every dollar added to the camp-fund gave the girls dreams of the mountains where canoeing, hiking, fishing and living in the open would constitute one long season of delight.

Mrs. Vernon listened to their plans and preparations, but she was too wise to discourage them by saying it would take longer than two weeks at the rate of income they were receiving to earn sufficient capital to outfit a camp. She encouraged them in doing whatever work came for them to



do – be it dandelion roots or drying dishes – and explained how Perseverance and Persistence always rewarded one.

## CHAPTER TWO – AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION

Julie and Betty dropped their coins into the bank at home that was jointly kept for their savings, then they hurried out to the kitchen to see what kind of dessert May was preparing.

Eliza was busy with the finishing touches of the dinner when the twins ran in; and being the nominal head of the family since the mother was gone, she ordered the children around.

“Here, Betty – mash them pertaters whiles I strain the squash, will yuh?” said she.

“Shall I add the butter and cream, ‘Liza?” asked Betty, eagerly taking up the patent masher because it was considered great fun to watch the tiny squirms of mealy potato run through the sieve.

“Julie kin get the butter an’ cream – yuh jest hurry and do the mashin’. I’m gettin’ late with th’ dinner ennyway,” replied Eliza, turning her attention to the roast in the oven.

Julie started for the jug of cream, but stopped at May’s side and asked: “How far is it from here to the Adirondacks, Maysy – I mean, how much does it cost to get there?”

“It’s a good ways, and I’ve heard it costs a lot of money, but I don’t know exactly how much. Why?”

“Oh, nothing much – I just wanted to know, that’s all,” returned Julie, as she took up the jug to carry it back to Betty.

“We want to figure out how much more money we’ll have to earn, Maysy, before we can start for that camp. That’s why Jule asked,” explained Betty, conscientious even in little things like this.

“Hoh! why you girls will have to weed Vernon’s lawn all summer before you can raise money enough to pay carfare to the Adirondacks!” laughed John, who now scuffled into the kitchen to see if he could find anything good to eat before dinner was served.

“We didn’t ask your opinion! You’re only a child, so how would you know about carfares,” retorted Julie, condescendingly.

“Oh, really! Is that so! Well, let me tell you, I know a heap more about it than you dream of, ‘cause I’m planning to go to Chimney Point Camp myself this summer – so!” exclaimed John, feeling highly gratified when he saw the looks of consternation on his sisters’ faces. But he forgot to reckon with Eliza.

Eliza was a trifle more than six feet in height, and buxom as well. She had powerful hands and feet and when she snapped her mouth shut as a signal of disapproval, the children knew better than to argue.

Now Eliza plunked the soup-pot down upon the range and wheeled to face John. Her broad hands went to their habitual rest upon her ample hips, and she inquired in a high falsetto voice:

“John Lee! Does your father know what you’ve just said?”

“Not yet, but he will t’night, ‘Liza; the Y. M. C. A. director of our gym is coming to see him about it,” replied John, without the bravado he had expressed towards his sisters.

“Then lem’me tell you this much, sonny! Ef your father asks me fer an opinion – and I s’pose he will, seein’ how I has brung you all up – I’ll come out an’ tell him it ain’t fair fer him t’ let you take money to go to camp this summer, an’ make th’ girls set to work to earn their’n. An’ that’s onny fair to all!”

“Oh, I am not going to spend money, ‘Liza – I’m goin’ to help wash dishes in camp to pay for my board,” hastily added John.

“Wash dishes! Huh!” snorted Eliza disdainfully. “I’d hate t’ hev to eat from them dishes!” Then as an afterthought struck her humorously, she added: “But men-folks don’t know th’ diffrunce – they eat what’s set before them, whether dishes are clean or dirty!”

May laughed appreciatively and said: “Which goes to show how much ‘Liza appraises John’s ability to wash dishes.”

“Er anything else, that I knows of,” murmured Eliza, winking at May. “Don’t we have t’ look after his neck and ears every day afore he goes to school?”

Julie joined May in the laugh at John’s expense, and he rushed out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind him. But Betty turned to Eliza and said:

“Liza, John’s getting to be too big a boy for us to tease like that. I think we hurt his feelings just now.”

“Betsy, if John’s too big for teasin’ then he’s big enough to ’tend to his own wardrobe and appearance. Now I wonder what he would look like in ten days ef I didn’ keep after him all the time?”

Betty said no more but she had finished mashing the potatoes and so she ran out, planning how she could please John in order to compensate him for the teasing from Eliza.

Julie had been hanging about, thinking she could scrape the bowl clean when her sister had finished whipping the cream for the Snow Pudding. But May had other plans. When the cream had stiffened into a peak of snow-like froth, the bowl was carried to the refrigerator and there placed upon the ice.

With a regretful sigh, Julie watched, then ran out after Betty. John and Betty were in the sitting-room asking Mr. Lee about railroad fares and camp-life. So Julie was just in time to hear his reply.

Having figured roughly on a scrap of paper, Mr. Lee told his questioners about how much it would cost to reach the Adirondacks. John whistled in surprise, and Betty looked at Julie in chagrin.

“My goodness, Betty! It will take us all summer to earn that much money.”

“I guess we’ll have to find some mountains nearer home, then,” ventured Betty, wistfully.

“I wonder what Ruth will do when she hears we can’t earn enough money for fares,” added Julie.

The following day after school, the four girls met again on Vernon’s lawn and exchanged items of news with each other. But the most discouraging of all was the telling of the cost of carfare to the Adirondacks.

They stood with baskets hanging from their arms, and weeding tools idle, while faces expressed the disappointment at hearing Betty’s story. Finally Ruth said:

“Then there’s no use breaking our backs over this old lawn. I’ll not dig dandelions if it isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to make you feel that way, when I told you about the fares,” expostulated Betty. “I only wanted you to know we’d have to find some other camp-place to go to, nearer home.”

“Anyway, girls, don’t let’s quit work just now, because we found out about the cost of traveling. Let’s keep right on and who knows! we may wind up in the Alps this summer – carfares, steamers for ocean voyages, and everything included – paid for and presented to us by an unknown uncle from a far country!” laughed Joan.

“Let me tell you something, too!” added Betty. “Let’s try to keep up our spirits while weeding this afternoon, by talking over what we will do when we reach the mountains. I’d rather pretend we were in the Adirondacks, or the Rockies, than over in Europe. But we can picture ourselves in the mountains, *somewhere*, like Sarah Crewe did you know, about her father and home, even while she had to live in the attic!”

The girls laughed at Betty’s optimism, but she took the laugh in good part; then she began weeding and at the same time began a fine oration on the beauties of the mountains and the wonders of Nature.

Soon the other girls were weeding, too, and vied with one another in thinking of some wonderful camp sports or plan they could talk about. Soon, to Ruth’s great amazement, each girl had rooted out the required number of dandelions for the day.

“Now then, didn’t I tell you we could work better if we thought of pleasant things and plans?” exulted Betty.

“We certainly did our stint this afternoon without the usual complaints and delays,” admitted Joan. “Let’s root some more.”

The rest of the afternoon passed quickly, and by the time the girls carried their baskets of weeds to Mrs. Vernon to be paid for, they found they had earned twice as much money, for they had each rooted out 200 plants instead of their usual 100.

As they sat on the cool verandah enjoying ice-cream and cakes, they told their hostess how it was they had weeded so many dandelions. Then they told her about their discouragement when they had heard how expensive a trip it would be to go to camp in the Adirondacks. But in reply to all their talking, Mrs. Vernon smiled and nodded her head.

They began to say “good-by” for the day, when Mrs. Vernon said: “I’ll have pleasant news for you to-morrow.”

“Oh, can’t we be told just a word about it now?” cried Ruth.

“Is it about a camp in the mountains?” added Joan.

But Mrs. Vernon shook her head in mild reproof of their curiosity, and refused to be beguiled into sharing her secret.

The Dandelion Girls, as they now styled themselves, lost no time after school was dismissed, the next afternoon, in running to the Vernon’s house. They found Mrs. Vernon on the side porch waiting for them.

“Before you begin work to-day, I thought I would mention a little idea I had last night after you left. It is not *the* secret but it has some connection with it.

“When Mr. Vernon came home last night, he told me he had heard of a fine tent for sale very cheap. There are several cot-beds and four lockers to go with it. He secured an option on it until he could ascertain what your decision might be about the purchase.

“As it is such a bargain, I would advise our buying it; then we can erect it on the rear lawn, and your tools and other chattels can be kept in the lockers. It would also provide us with a clubroom all our own while here, and when we go away to the mountains we will have a tent all ready to take with us.”

“Oh, I think that is lovely!” cried Julie, clapping her hands.

“It is so good of Uncle Verny and you – and we thank you a thousand times!” exclaimed Betty, thinking of gratitude before she gave a thought to the fun they might have in the tent.

“Well, it will make us feel as if we were preparing for a camp-life this summer, even though we may not be able to really afford it,” sighed Ruth, despondently.

“Heigh there! Cheer up, can’t you? Don’t be a gloom just when Verny tells us something so fine!” called Joan, reprovingly.

“But we don’t even know the price! Maybe it will take all the savings we have had on hand for our camping purposes,” argued Ruth.

“That’s so,” admitted Julie and Joan, but Betty said:

“How much will it cost us, Verny?”

“Well, as I am going to enjoy this outfit as much as any one of you girls, I am going to pay my share of the costs – exactly one-fifth of the total, girls.”

Ruth smiled unpleasantly at this reply, as if to say: “And you with all your money only doing what we girls each are doing!”

Mrs. Vernon saw the smile and understood the miscomprehension that caused it, but she also knew that Ruth would soon overcome all such erroneous methods of thinking and feeling if she but continued interesting herself in the Scout work and ideals.

“How much will the total cost be, Verny?” asked Julie.

Mrs. Vernon took out a slip of paper and read aloud the items that went with the tent, then concluded by mentioning the cash sum asked for the entire outfit.

“Why, it sounds awfully cheap!” exclaimed Betty.

“I think it is, girls, that is why I advise you to take it.”

“What under the sun do we want of an ax, a saw, and all that carpenter’s outfit? Why not let the man keep them and deduct the sum from the cost of the outfit?” asked Ruth.

“Because, my dear, a good ax, and other tools, are as necessary in camp-work and life as the tent itself. At present, tools are very expensive, and these are of the best quality steel, Uncle Verny says.”

“Well, buy them if you want to, but don’t expect *me* to wear water blisters on my hands by handling an ax or spade. Not when *I* go to camp!” retorted Ruth.

Little attention was paid to this rudeness, as Ruth’s friends knew enough of the laws of the scouts to ignore such shortcomings in others, but to try, instead, to nourish that which was worthy of perpetuation in thought and deed.

“Having our own tent where we can rest when we like makes it seem as if the mountains were much nearer us than so far off as the Adirondacks really are,” said Betty, happily.

“It may turn out that this camp will be all we shall have for this year,” commented Ruth.

“I don’t see why you should say that!” demanded Joan, impatiently.

“Because we’ll spend our money on this old thing and then have to weed and weed all the rest of the summer to earn the carfares.”

“It won’t figure up any differently in the end, ’cause we’d have to have some kind of a tent, wouldn’t we?” asked Julie.

“We might be able to borrow some – or buy them on the installment plan. I even might tease father to lend us the money to buy new ones when we are ready to go,” replied Ruth.

“It isn’t one of our rules to borrow or go in debt. We each want to demonstrate independence as we go along. Buying on credit, or with borrowed capital, is a very undesirable method of doing business,” said Mrs. Vernon, gravely.

“But paying back for a tent next fall, instead of next week, isn’t as bad as you seem to think,” insisted Ruth.

“All the same, we girls are going to buy for cash, and never borrow trouble, if we can help it!” declared Julie, sensibly.

“Then it is settled, is it? We take the tent?” said Mrs. Vernon.

“Of course! Even Ruth must admit that it is a bargain,” returned the three girls in a chorus.

“I don’t know the least thing about costs of camping, and there seems so little hope of my ever participating in such joys!” retorted Ruth. But they all knew she was well pleased with the purchase.

That afternoon they went to work with a zeal hitherto unfelt, for they had a keen sense of proprietorship in something worth-while. Mrs. Vernon felt happy, too, over the way the girls voted to pay cash as they went, for she knew it meant individual freedom for each; and Ruth would soon be made to understand the meaning of “obligations” if she associated with three such practical girls.

The moment the weeding was done for the afternoon, four eager girls assembled to hear about the “great secret.” Mrs. Vernon began by saying:

“Now I don’t want you girls to be disappointed in what *I* consider my fine secret, but I really think it is the only way out for this summer.”

Ruth sniffed audibly and sat with lifted eyebrows, as if to suggest: “Didn’t I tell you that tent would be all you got this year for your money!”

But Mrs. Vernon continued her preamble without hesitation.

“Even should you girls earn ten times the amount of money you are now receiving each afternoon, you would still lack enough to pay carfares to the Adirondacks, or the White Mountains. And as we agreed from the beginning never to borrow money for our scout work, such a long trip seems out of the question at present.

“Last night I sat puzzling over this situation, when a splendid idea flashed into my mind. I remembered a campsite in the mountains not so far from here, that will give us all the delights of the Adirondacks without the costs. A motor truck can carry our outfits instead of our shipping them by freight, and we can go there in my car, whenever we are ready to start.

“If we decide on such a plan, we could prepare to leave home the week following the closing of school. I think it will take us at least that long to get everything ready, you know.”

“Oh, how wonderful!” breathed Betty, joyfully.

“Our dreams come true!” sighed Joan and Julie.

But Ruth, as usual, could not accept any proposition, no matter how pleasant, without argument. So she said: “How do we know this campsite is where we might wish to spend a summer?”

“Mrs. Lee and I spent a summer there when we were girls, and your own mother cried because she had to go with her parents to the farm in the Catskills, instead of camping with her schoolmates. Perhaps your mother will describe the beauties of this place to you, so you will feel sure it is desirable enough for you,” said Mrs. Vernon, calmly, but with a faint suggestion of sarcasm in her tone.

Ruth had the grace to keep silence after that, and Mrs. Vernon said: “I’m not going to say more about the idea, but you shall judge for yourselves when I take you there in the auto on Saturday.”

“Dear me. I feel so excited that I’m sure I won’t be able to sleep all week!” exclaimed Julie, jumping up and dancing around.

“I feel as if there were wheels whirring around inside of me,” added Joan.

The others laughed, and Mrs. Vernon admitted: “That is the way I felt when it was agreed that I might join my friends for camp-life that summer.”

“It will be so lovely to camp in the same place that mother dear did when she was a little girl,” said Betty, her voice trembling slightly as she thought of the one now absent from sight, but not in spirit.

“I don’t know but what I’d rather try out the first summer in camp with no other scout girls to watch and comment about our mistakes,” confessed Joan. “If we start alone this year, we will feel like experienced scouts by next summer.”

“I agree with you there, Joan,” said Julie.

“Then we are pleased with my plan to ride out and inspect the old campsite on Saturday, eh?” ventured Mrs. Vernon.

“Yes, indeed!” chorused four voices; even Ruth agreed with her friends about this week-end outing.

By Saturday the girls had paid for the tent and outfit bought of the man, and had nineteen dollars left for expenses at a camp that summer. They were at Headquarters (they named the tent on the back-lawn “Dandelion Headquarters”) an hour before the time decided upon for the early start to the mountains. But it was as Julie said:

“Better too early than too late!”

Mrs. Vernon was giving last instructions about packing a luncheon to take with them, then she came out and joined her Patrol.

“What do you think, Verny? Eliza said she would bake us a crockful of ginger-snaps and cookies every week this summer, and send them to camp for us, because we would not be home to eat.”

“How are you going to get them? I asked mother about the campsite and she said it was three or four miles from any village,” said Ruth, this being the first inkling she had given that she had inquired about the camp.

“Why Rural Delivery will leave it for us, Daddy said,” replied Julie.

“And my mother said I could make fudge to sell to my family and friends. She would give me the sugar and chocolate. Father ordered two pounds then and there – so that makes a dollar more that I shall have earned before next week,” said Joan.

“I can make good fudge, too. I’ll ask May if I may sell it!” exclaimed Julie.

“Our waitress left last night, and mother said she would pay me a quarter a night if I would wash the dishes. But I hate doing dishes. The greasy water gets all over your hands and then they smell so!” said Ruth, not willing to be left out of this working-community.

“Did you do them?” eagerly asked the girls.

“Of course not! I didn’t want to feel all warm and sticky for the rest of the evening. Besides, I manicured my nails so nicely just before dinner.”

“Dear me! I wish your mother would let me do them – for a quarter a night!” sighed Betty, anxiously.

“Even if she did, would you give *that* money to the Patrol?” wondered Ruth, doubtfully.

“Sure! Aren’t we all earning for the general good?”

“Well, I’ll ask mother if she’ll let you do them,” replied Ruth, magnanimously. She actually felt that she was bestowing a favor on Betty by allowing her to wash her dishes and donate the earnings to the camp-fund.

## CHAPTER THREE – THE OLD CAMPSITE

Early Saturday morning the chauffeur brought the car over to the tent, and Mrs. Vernon told the girls to jump in while she sent Jim for the lunch-baskets. She got in the front seat, as she proposed driving the car.

When all was ready, the merry party started off with Mr. Vernon wishing them a good time. They were soon outside of town limits, and skimming over a good hard country road. Then Mrs. Vernon drove slower and spoke of the place they were bound for.

"Of course you know, girls, that it is not necessary for you to select this site if you do not like it. I am merely driving you there because it seems to meet with our present needs for a camp-life. We still have other places we can investigate, as there is a pyramid of catalogues on the table in the tent."

"But every one of those camping places will cost us so much money to reach, and that won't leave us anything for board," said Joan.

"Father told us last night that he always wanted to get a crowd of the boys to go with him to that camp you all made when you were girls. But his chums wanted to go so far away that they never got anywhere to camp in the end," said Betty.

"Yes, and he said he wished he could have his boyhood over again. Then he'd spend his vacations in camp even if it was near home," added Julie.

Mrs. Vernon smiled. "I remember how jealous a few of the boys were when they heard us talk of the fun we had in camp. Betty's mother was so sorry for them that she invited them to visit the camp now and then. Betty takes after her mother for having a great heart."

"Maybe we can invite our folks to visit us, too," said Julie, eagerly.

"So we can – if they will come and bring supplies," said Ruth.

Every one laughed at this suggestion, and Ruth added: "Well, we can't afford to pay for visitors, can we? I won't be surprised to find that we shall have to break camp and return home in a month's time, just for lack of funds to go on with the experiment."

"We won't do even that if we have to chop cord wood to pay our way," laughed Mrs. Vernon.

"Are there big trees on the mountain, Verny?" asked Betty.

"We girls thought it a great forest in those days. To us it seemed as if the trees were giants – but we had not seen the Redwoods of California then," Mrs. Vernon chuckled as she spoke.

"What do you call it now?" asked Joan.

"This ridge has no individual name that I know of, but the range is an extension of those known by the name of Blue Mountains. The place I have in mind is one of the prettiest spots on this particular spur of hills. You will find forest trees, streams, pools for bathing, softest moss for carpets, flowers for study, wild woodland paths for hikes – in fact everything to rejoice a nature-lover's heart."

"Dear me, can't you speed up a little?" asked Julie.

"No, don't, Verny – we'll land in jail if you go faster!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Let's call this spur 'Verny's Mountain,' shall we, girls?" suggested Betty.

"Yes, let's!" abetted Joan.

The automobile rolled smoothly and swiftly along, and after the first excitement had abated somewhat, the girls begged their Captain to tell them how she had found the place and what they did at camp when she was a girl.

"I think it was that one summer in camp that made me eager to give every girl an opportunity to enjoy a like experience. But we went there under far different auspices than you girls are now doing. We had to convince our parents that we would not be murdered by tramps, or starved, or made ill by sleeping out-of-doors in the woods.



“Then, too, we had to load our outfit on a farm-wagon and climb in on top of it so that one trip would do all the moving, as horses were scarce for pleasure-trips, but were needed for farm-work in those days.

“I can remember the shock we girls created with the village people, when it was whispered around that we proposed a camp-life that summer, instead of sitting home to do tatting and bleaching the linen. It was all right for boys to have a camp for fun – but for girls, never!

“However we six girls were of the new era for women, and we wanted to do the things our brothers and their schoolmates did. They could go camping and fishing and hiking so why couldn’t we? What difference did skirts and pig-tails make in vacation-time? So we won over our parents’ consent to let us try it for a week.

“But we stayed a month, and then a second month until we made the whole summer of it. And, girls, we brought home more knitted socks and crochet trimming and tatting, with an abundance of good health and experience thrown in, than all the rest of the girls in the village could show together.

“Even the parson, who had visited our mothers to dissuade them from allowing us this unheard-of freedom of camp-life, had to admit that he had been prejudiced by members of his congregation.”

“Just like a story-book, Verny! Do tell us what you did when you first got to camp?” cried Julie.

“Well, it was lucky for us girls that my brother Ted drove the farm-wagon for us. When we reached the steep road that ran up over the mountain, we had to leave the horses and wagon and carry our outfit to the site we had selected.

“Then Ted showed us how to build a fireplace, an oven, and a pot-hanger. He also helped us ditch all about the tent so the rain-water would drain away, and he constructed a latrine for camp.

“He promised to drive up on Sunday to see how we were faring, and bring a few of his chums with him, if they could get off from the farm-work. So we gladly said good-bye to him, and felt, at last, much like Susan Anthony must have felt when she realized her first victory in the fight over bondage for women.”

“And didn’t you have any guardian or grown-up to help take care of you?” wondered Ruth.

“The school-teacher planned to stay with us for a month, but she could not come for the first few days; and we feared we might be kept home unless we started before our folks repented, so we went alone on the day agreed upon.

“But, girls, I will confess, every one of us felt frightened that first night; for an owl hooted over our heads, and queer noises echoed all around us, so that we thought of all the dangers the foolish villagers had said would befall us.”

The car now went through a thriving village which Mrs. Vernon said was Freedom, the last settlement they would see this side of the campsite. With the announcement that they were now nearing “Verny’s Mountain,” the four girls were silent; but they watched eagerly for the woodcutters’ road that Mrs. Vernon said would be the place where they would leave the automobile and climb to the plateau.

The further they went, the wilder and more mountainous seemed the country; finally Mrs. Vernon drove the car up a rutty, rocky road until the trail seemed to rise sheer up the rugged side of the mountain.

“Here’s where we have to get out and walk, girls.”

And glad they were, too, to jump out and stretch themselves after the long drive. They stood and gazed rapturously around at the wildness and grandeur of the place, and all four admitted that no one could tell the difference between Verny’s Mountain and the Adirondacks.

“We’ll take turns in carrying the hampers, girls,” said Mrs. Vernon, lifting the well-laden baskets from the automobile.

They began climbing the side of the mountain by following the old woodcutters’ path, until they reached a large, grassy plateau. Back of this flat a ledge rose quite sheer, in great masses of bed-

rock. Mosses and lichen clung to the niches of this rocky wall, which was at least forty feet high, making it most picturesque.

“What a wonderful view of the valley we get from this plateau!” exclaimed Joan.

“Is this where you camped, Verny?” eagerly asked Julie.

“No, but this is where we danced and shouted and played like any wild mountain habitants,” laughed Mrs. Vernon, the joys of that girlhood summer lighting her eyes. “And here is where you girls can play scout games and dances, or sit to dream of home and far-away friends.”

“The scout games we’ll enjoy here, but dreams of home – never! We’ll have to go back there soon enough,” declared Joan, causing the others to laugh merrily.

“Well, come on, girls. Our campsite lies just there beyond that cluster of giant pines that rear their heads high above the surrounding forest trees,” said Mrs. Vernon, leading the way across the plateau.

The sound of falling water became plainer as they went, and soon, between the trunks of the trees skirting the plateau, the girls spied a beautiful waterfall. It tumbled from one great boulder to another, until it splashed into a basin worn deep in the farthest end of the plateau; thence it sought the easiest way to reach the valley, making many sparkling pools and musical waterfalls in its descent.

“How perfectly lovely!” breathed Betty, standing with clasped hands and a gaze that was riveted on the falls.

“You had plenty of water for cooking and bathing, didn’t you?” said practical Julie.

“Yes, and that was one reason we chose this spot for our camp. You see this high rocky wall made a fine wind-shield from the north, and where could one find a more convenient gymnasium than that flat? The pines and waterfall over here provided shelter and supply. So we built our hut against the wall under those trees.”

“Hut? You never told us you built a hut,” exclaimed Joan.

“No, because I have no idea of finding it here. I suppose the logs have rotted away years ago,” returned Mrs. Vernon.

“We might build another one, Verny, ’cause I see plenty of down-timber,” suggested Betty.

“And it will be great sport to play carpenter,” added Joan.

Mrs. Vernon forced a way through the tangle of briars and bushes that had grown up since that long-ago, and the scouts followed directly after her.

“Girls, here is the pool where we used to swim – isn’t it lovely?”

The girls stood still, admiring the clear water and the reflection of green trees in the pool; then the Captain turned and began breaking down slender twigs and bending aside green berry-bushes, as she eagerly blazed a trail towards the wall.

Here, not fifty feet from the pool, was glimpsed the old frame and timbers of a log cabin. A mass of vines and moss almost hid the hut from view, so that one would unconsciously pass it by, thinking it but the trunk of a cluster of old trees against the wall.

“Oh, we must have built well to have had it survive all these years, girls!” cried Mrs. Vernon, joyfully, as she stood and looked at the handiwork of her friends of years long gone.

“Verny, this is the way we girls will build, too. We will erect a hut alongside this, and show it to our children many years from now,” said Betty, fervently.

“I don’t see why we can’t use this hut, too,” said Julie.

“The frame and floor beams are solid enough,” added Joan, examining the posts.

“It will need a roof and some new side-logs – that is all,” Ruth said, taking a lively interest in the camp-plan.

“Yes, we can easily repair it, and then you girls can build your own hut as an annex to this hotel,” said Mrs. Vernon, still smiling with satisfaction at the discovery of the cabin.

“Dear me! I wish we had brought our camp outfit to-day and could stay to begin work,” complained Joan.

"I'm crazy to start, too," admitted Julie.

"But we have to have those tools, and some others besides. I shall ask Uncle Verny to sell us some of his extra ones. He has several hammers, screw-drivers, and other implements he can spare," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Now what can we look at?" inquired Ruth, quickly wearying of one thing. This was one of the weak tendencies Mrs. Vernon hoped to cure that summer.

"You can bring the hampers over to the pool, if you like, and when we are through planning here, we will join you and have our picnic."

"Why, I don't want to carry them alone! Can't we all go now and do it?"

"I want to snoop about here a little more," said Julie.

"And I want to figure out how many tree-trunks we'll have to drag over here before we can have a cabin as good as this one," called Joan, as she measured the length of logs with a hair-ribbon.

"Mercy! Aren't any of you going to eat before you finish that nonsense?" Ruth asked plaintively.

Mrs. Vernon smiled. Then she turned to Joan and said: "If you girls will really promise to build and finish a hut, I will ask Uncle Verny to loan us the farm-horse to haul the timbers. You girls could never drag them, you know. But Hepsy is accustomed to hauling and heavy work, so we need have no fear of straining her."

"Just the thing! Hepsy forever!" shouted Joan, throwing her hat in the air for a salute.

"Can you remember all the things we still need this summer, Verny?" asked Julie, anxiously.

"We'll jot down everything as we remember it, then we can compare lists when we go to order the things," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Won't the girls at school look green with envy when we tell them we are going to have a strange girl camp with us this summer?" laughed Julie, as a thought struck her.

"Who is she?" gasped the other girls in surprise.

"Ho! did I get you on that?" teased Julie.

"This is the first hint we've had of it," complained Joan.

"Why no! Verny suggested the plan herself – didn't you, Verny?"

But Mrs. Vernon shook her head doubtfully, while Julie shouted with delight at their mystification. Then, eager to share her fun, she cried laughingly: "Hepsy, the dear old girl!"

Of course when one is happy and gay it takes but little to cause loud and long merriment, and so it was in this instance. They laughed uproariously at the joke, and decided then and there to tease the other girls at school who were so anxious to join a Patrol, but would not weed the dandelions to earn money for a camp.

As weeding had been the best test of endurance and patience Mrs. Vernon could think of at the time, she had felt rather relieved to find that only four responded to the initiation invitation. In doing things according to the Handbook for Captains, she felt she would find four girls sufficient material to practice upon for the first season.

When the luncheon was unpacked and spread out, Mrs. Vernon smiled continuously at the happy chatter of the four girls, and the thousand-and-one plans they made for the camp that summer. Then all sat down to enjoy the feast, for nothing had ever tasted so good to them before, and then – did Verny say it was time to start for home?

"Oh, no! It can't be late, Verny!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Why, we've only been here half a minute, Verny," added Joan.

The Captain glanced at her wrist watch. "We have been here more than two hours, girls, and it is a two hour drive back, you know."

"Dear, dear! the only comfort I have in leaving now is the hope of being here for all summer in another week!" cried Betty.

"Then you have decided to choose this site?" ventured the Captain.

“I thought you knew it! Of course this is what we want,” admitted Ruth, frankly. And Mrs. Vernon mentally gave her a credit-mark for forgetting self enough to speak her opinion honestly.

The drive back was much longer than going, even though the girls planned and plotted how to earn more money with which to buy everything they craved for that camp. It was to be a wonder-camp.

“I can add a dollar and seventy-five cents to the fund now,” announced Ruth, calmly.

“A dollar and s-e-v-e-n-t-y – five cents!” gasped the girls.

“Then I’ll have another dollar and a half before next Friday – if I keep on washing those nasty dishes every night!”

“R-rruth!” squealed Betty, throwing her arms about her friend’s neck.

“Ruth Bentley!” cried Joan.

“I cannot believe my ears!” added Julie, in a whisper.

Mrs. Vernon never said a word, but she did a lot of silent praying – thanking Him for this break in the clouds of human will and selfishness that the girl had always displayed hitherto.

Ruth felt embarrassed at so much fussing, and felt a deep gratitude to the Captain for not adding to her self-consciousness. The moment she could free herself from Betty’s loving embrace, she said, recklessly:

“I told mother I’d rather give up camping than do those dishes any more, but now that I’ve seen the place, I’ll scrub the kitchen floor if she wants me to.”

A great laugh relieved every one’s feelings at this statement from Ruth, and the merry party reached the Vernon home feeling very much at peace with the world in general.

## CHAPTER FOUR – BEGINNING THEIR CAMP LIFE

The next few days were so filled with the final work to finish the scholastic year, and closing of school, that every one of the girls was kept busy, and had little time to think of camp.

Once Thursday came, however, the only exciting thing remained to be done was Commencement on Friday; so the four girls met at Dandelion Tent to plan for the camp.

“We ought to have our folks give us a great send-off, like they did with the regiments that mustered from the town families,” said Julie.

“If they’ll only give us all I asked for, we will be satisfied,” laughed Joan.

“What did you do?” instantly said three voices.

“First, I told mother what we would have to have for camp, then I got mother to visit your folks and tell them what we really ought to have to make life comfortable in the wild woods.”

“Oh, oh! That’s why Eliza told us she would fix us up with some jams and other food-stuff,” laughed Julie.

“And mother asked me did we want any furniture or china?” added Ruth.

“What did you say?” asked Julie.

“I told her we’d rather she donated the price of china or furniture this time, and let us invest it as we found need.”

The girls laughed and Mrs. Vernon ran out of the side door, saying: “I’m missing all the fun! Do tell me what it is about?”

Then Julie told her what Ruth had replied to her mother’s question, and the Captain laughed also. “I see Ruth is developing a wonderfully keen sense of finance.”

“You’ll say so when you see this scrap of paper, Verny,” said Ruth, taking a crumpled oblong of tinted paper from her middy blouse and passing it over to the Captain.

Mrs. Vernon looked at it in surprise, and gasped: “Why, of all things!”

“The price of china and furniture that mother figured we would smash or damage,” explained Ruth.

“Girls, it’s a check for twenty-five dollars from Mrs. Bentley. We’ll have to vote her a letter of thanks at once.”

“Hurrah! Now, all ready for three cheers for Mrs. Bentley!” shouted Julie, jumping upon the camp-stool and waving her hat.

Instantly the girls began a loud hurrah, but the folding chair suddenly shut up, with Julie frantically trying to balance herself. Before a second hurrah could have been given, Julie was sprawling across the camp table right on top of the hats, pans and what-not that had been accumulated to take to camp. Such a clatter of tins and wild screams of laughter that filled that tent!

Finally Julie emerged from the wreckage and stood up, tentatively feeling of her bones and head and body. “Am I all in one piece, girls?” she asked, trying to appear anxious.

“You are, but my hat isn’t!” retorted Joan, holding up a crushed straw sailor with the brim severed from the crown.

“I’ll have to work and buy you another,” said Julie.

“Please don’t! I despise sailors and had to wear this one because mother said I would need no new summer hat if I was in camp,” hastily explained Joan.

“Come, girls, we must indite that letter to Ruth’s mother now. Sit down quietly and suggest something fine,” interpolated Mrs. Vernon.

So the letter was composed and given to Ruth to deliver, then the last plans for leaving home were perfected, and the Patrol separated for the day.

Saturday found the girls again at Vernon’s place, eager to hear what day they were to start for camp. Everything that they had on their lists had been provided, and now the only thing to do was

to say good-by and leave. This the girls felt could not be accomplished any too soon for their peace and comfort.

“Why, Verny, if we don’t get away in a day or so, those seven girls who are possessed to join us will steal us and hold us as hostages until you agree to take them in our Troop,” said Julie.

“Patience! They’ll have to wait now, and learn the lesson you girls have finished before they can join this Patrol. Why, I wonder if you realize how high you have climbed on the rungs of the ladder of Scout Ideals during these past few weeks?” said Mrs. Vernon.

“I can’t see any change,” said Joan.

“What! don’t you think your friends here have improved any whatsoever since we decided to begin a Troop?”

“Oh – the girls have – a little, but I haven’t!”

“You have, too, but you don’t see it yet. Wait.”

“All the same, Verny, tell us when we *can* start?” begged Julie.

“Well, Mr. Vernon sails for his European trip on Monday, so I see nothing to keep us home after that. Can you all be ready to go on Tuesday morning?”

“You know we can – why ask?” laughed Julie.

“Maybe you’d prefer us to start Monday afternoon after you come home from the steamer,” suggested Ruth.

Mrs. Vernon laughed. “Hardly as soon as that.”

When Tuesday arrived, however, the girls found many little things to delay them, so it was past nine o’clock before they met at the old headquarters, but the tent had disappeared.

“Here we are, Verny, bag and baggage!” shouted Julie, as they tramped up the side-steps of the porch.

“And some of our folks are coming over in a few minutes to see us off. I suspect they have various advices to whisper to you, as well as leave with us some forgotten parting words,” said Joan.

“Eliza’s going to give us a parting pie,” added Betty, so innocently that every one laughed.

“Well, the visitor that we invited to camp with us for the summer is hitched up and waiting to start,” Mrs. Vernon informed the girls, as she pointed towards the barns, where a horse was seen going down the back road.

“Why, Hepsy’s hooked up to a buckboard? What for?” asked Ruth.

“We won’t need it this summer, so Uncle Verny suggested that Hepsy take it along for us to use if we had to go to the stores at Freedom, or should we want to go away on a picnic.”

“Say – that’s a great idea! I never thought of it,” said Julie.

“Which proves that you have no monopoly on great ideas,” retorted Joan.

Then the automobile drove up to the steps and was soon followed by a heavy rumbling auto-truck that was used for heavy cartage at Mr. Vernon’s factory. He had sent it down for the newly-fledged Scout Troop to make use of to carry tents, boxes and what not to Verny’s Mountain.

The advance line of family members now came straggling up the road to watch their girls depart. Before the truck started, the other friends arrived, so there was quite a crowd to wish them good-by and good-luck as they climbed into the car and wildly waved hats and hands.

The ride seemed very short that morning, for so much had to be talked over, and the village of Freedom was reached before they could realize it. Then began the ascent up the woodroad to the plateau. Here the car halted, and the chauffeur assisted the driver of the truck in transferring the boxes and baggage to the buckboard Hepsy had brought thus far.

“We’ll have to stable Hepsy somewhere, girls,” suggested Julie, as she stood and watched the men work.

“Yes, we ought to make that our first concern, for Hepsy may not appreciate outdoor life as we do – especially if it rains.”

“We’ll build her a hut,” promised Ruth, eagerly.

“And let her sit out under a tree for the four weeks it will take us to erect it?” laughed Joan.

The girls were too eager to reach their campsite to wait any longer for the men to complete the baggage transfer, so they informed the Captain:

“We’ll take our suitcases and start up, Verny!”

Mrs. Vernon readily agreed to this, so they started off and were soon out of sight. Once they had reached the old cabin, Julie said:

“Let’s get out of these city clothes and get into our scout camp-uniforms.”

This met with general approval, and soon the girls were gleefully comparing notes about each other’s appearance. But this was interrupted when shouts and crackling of brush was heard. Then poor Hepsy was seen snorting and pulling to bring the loaded buckboard up to the plateau.

“Gee! That’s some haul – that grade!” complained Jim, as he mopped his hot brow and stood looking back at the steep road.

“And Hepsy’s so soft from no recent work!” added Mrs. Vernon, as she reached his side. Jim was too easy with the horses for their own good, so she said what she did to let him know his sympathy was misplaced.

Hepsy began nibbling at the luscious grass that grew near her feet, and Mrs. Vernon laughingly added: “Poor thing! She must be almost dead to be able to start right in and eat like that.”

The luggage was taken to the hut and then Jim went back for a second load. The back seat of the buckboard had been removed so the camp outfit could be easily piled upon the floor of the vehicle. But it did not hold very much, hence it was necessary to make several trips.

When all was carted up to the campsite, Mrs. Vernon said: “Now, Jim, remember to bring the oats once a week for Hepsy, and any other things I write for. See that all mail is forwarded to Freedom, where we can get it.”

Jim promised to see that everything was done as requested, then he, too, left. When the last chugs from the automobile truck and the car died away, Mrs. Vernon turned to the girls.

“Well, scouts, here we are for a whole summer of delights!”

“Hip, hip – ” began Julie, and the others joined in.

“Don’t you think the hut has grown smaller since we were here last?” asked Betty, wonderingly.

“That is because you were picturing the place on a much grander scale after you got home than it actually is. It is your thought that has to dwindle again to take in the proportion of the hut as it is,” replied the Captain, amused at Betty’s experience.

“I thought the very same thing, but I hated to say anything that sounded like criticism,” admitted Joan.

“Tell the truth, girls, I think that hut is tiny, but it looked big enough the other day,” laughed Julie.

“Then we must build ours larger than this,” said Mrs. Vernon, turning to look over the stock of things needing shelter.

“It looks like an awful heap of stuff, doesn’t it?” asked Ruth.

“Yes, but we needed everything, so we had to bring them.”

“What shall we do first, Verny?” asked Betty.

“Better pitch the tent first of all, and arrange the cots, then we can work as long as we like, without worrying about having to make our beds.”

The girls quickly unrolled the large canvas tent they had purchased, but when it came to erecting it, they found it a much more difficult task than they had anticipated. Jim and the gardener had helped pitch it the first time, but now they were absent.

However, after many failures, the tent was up, albeit it looked wobbly and one-sided. The cots were next opened and placed under the canvas, and the lockers were dragged to their right places.

“Where’s the crex rug Verny said we could bring for the ground inside the tent?” called Julie, thrusting her head from the opening of the canvas. But she forgot Ruth had placed a pole directly in front of the entrance to hold up the flap temporarily.

“Ouch! Who left that tree-trunk right in the way?” cried Julie, as she bumped her head smartly.

“That’s the porter standing at the door of our hotel!” retorted Joan, laughing as she saw Julie scowling.

“Well, where’s the crex rug, anyway?” demanded Julie.

“Come to think of it – Jim threw it out when he unloaded the truck, and then he must have forgotten to pick it up again,” said Mrs. Vernon.

“We’ll have to use grass for carpet to-night, then,” said Julie.

“Unless you run down and drag it up,” ventured Ruth.

“That’s what we brought Hepsy for, girls. Who’ll drive her down and bring back the rug?” called Mrs. Vernon from the hut.

All four were anxious to drive and enjoy the fun, so Julie jumped on the front seat and the others sat dangling their feet from the back of the buckboard. The Captain stood smiling and watching as they went, thinking to herself, “What a good time they will have in camp!”

When the amateur truckman returned, Ruth called out: “Guess what, Verny? We found the seat of the buckboard in the bushes, too. Wasn’t it fortunate we went for the rug?”

“We might have hunted all over the camp for that seat when we want to go for a drive, and never have thought of it being left down there,” added Julie.

When the girls ran over to see what next to do, they found the Captain eyeing a board about sixteen inches in length. She was calculating aloud and wondering if it would fit.

“Fit where? What is it for?” asked Joan.

“You’ll soon find out. Now you girls can unpack the hamper and get luncheon ready – I’m hungry,” replied Mrs. Vernon.

She knew this would meet with great approval, and soon they were busy unpacking the ready-made lunch, and placing it on a large flat rock.

“Ruth! quick – brush that awful bug from the butter!” shrieked Julie, as she stood with both her hands filled with dishes.

“Oh – oh! I can’t! It’s an awful looking creature!” cried Ruth, running away from the rock where the luncheon was spread.

“Joan – come here! What’s that beast on the butter – see?” called Julie, trying to set the tier of dishes down on the grass.

“It’s only a young dragon-fly – don’t you know one when you see it?” laughed Joan, shooing the insect away.

“I’ve seen them flying in the sunshine, but never on the butter-dish,” said Julie, picking up the dishes again and placing them on the cloth.

Mrs. Vernon had started for the rock-table when she heard the shouting, but now she laughed heartily. “Joan, where did you study insect-life that you know so much about one of the common members?”

“Wasn’t it a dragon-fly, Verny?”

“Not at all. I should think every one of you girls could tell a dragon-fly, because we have them about our gardens at home.”

“What was it, then?” asked Joan.

“I’m going to send to Scout Headquarters for a book on Insect Life, and have you study the different ones you find while in camp. Then you’ll become acquainted with them and never forget again. The same with flowers and trees – I must send for books that you can refer to and teach yourselves all you need to know about these things that every good scout knows.”



“Oh, come on and let’s eat. Every ant and bug in the land will get there before us, and we’ll have to eat leavings,” said Julie, whipping a hornet from the jelly dish.

So with all kinds of insects for guests, the girls ate their first lunch at camp. They were so hungry that stale bread would have tasted good, but given the delicious things prepared by the Vernons’ cook, it was small wonder they all felt uncomfortably full when they left the rock-table.

## CHAPTER FIVE – RUTH MEETS WITH DIFFICULTIES

Immediately after luncheon, the girls left the flat table-rock and ran off in quest of fun. They had ignored the remains of the meal, and the dishes were left to attract all the ants and flies within a radius of the odor of the food.

Mrs. Vernon had gone to the buckboard to unpack the chest that held the tools, and was engaged in sorting the nails she thought would be needed to repair the old hut. When she turned to see if the girls were almost through with the task of clearing away the dishes, she found them eagerly investigating the camp grounds.

“How I’d like to have a swim in this pool,” called Joan, standing beside the mirror-like water.

“Oh, no; we can take a dip any time. Let’s go for a hike up the mountainside. I want to explore,” cried Ruth.

“Why not wait until to-morrow morning for adventuring – I want to see if there are any fish in this trout brook,” said Betty.

Julie was out of hearing, but she was busy over some quest of her own, and she had shirked work as well as the others.

“Girls, is it possible that you are seeking for a kind fairy who might live in the woods, or are you just waiting for some one to happen along and offer services to you?” asked Mrs. Vernon.

“What do you mean?” inquired Joan, puzzled at the words.

“And what are *you* looking for, Verny?” asked Betty, seeing the Captain going about examining various spots, then glance up at the trees overhead, or shade her eyes to gaze at the sky.

“Finding a suitable place for the cook-stove,” said she.

“Cook-stove! Why, we didn’t bring any!” replied four girls.

“Oh, yes we did – I’ll show you a fine one to-morrow.”

“Are we to have running water in our bedrooms, too?” laughed Joan.

“You can, if you are willing to do the plumbing,” retorted Mrs. Vernon.

But evidently she found just the place she sought for; and now the girls were deeply interested in watching her build a camp-stove. “You see, I need a place where the smoke will not be driven into our tents, and also where the wind will act as a blower up the chimney and not a quencher of the fire.

“Julie, you can bring me some smooth flat stones for an oven, and Joan can find me a peck of small stones for a lining. Then Betty can cut a good strong young sapling about an inch through, cut off the twigs and leave a clean pole about five feet long; and Ruth can cut two shorter ones with crotches made by two limbs. The crotched limbs can be about three inches long and the poles cut to four feet high. Sharpen the ends to a point so we can drive them into the ground.”

Each girl went to do the bidding of their Captain, and when they returned they found a pit had been scooped out of the sheltered nook at the base of a huge rock. This pit was lined with smooth small stones, and the flat oven-stones firmly fixed at the back. Then the two notched poles were planted one on each side of the fireplace, and the long pole placed across the top, the ends fitting securely into the notches.

“To-night we shall have hot soup for supper, girls, and there will be plenty of hot water to wash dishes in.”

“Hadn’t we better heat some water now for the dishes?” asked Julie.

“Oh – haven’t you cleared away the lunch table and washed the dishes?” asked Mrs. Vernon, seemingly surprised.

“Not yet – there wasn’t any hot water,” said Ruth.

“Then we must heat some at once, for no good scout will postpone clearing away food and dishes after he has had a bountiful meal. It shows a lack of appreciation and gratitude to the Provider when one is slack about cheerfully doing his part,” said the Captain.

So Joan was sent for a pail of water, and the other girls were told to remove all signs of food from the rock and bring the dishes to the kitchen.

“Where is the kitchen?” giggled Ruth.

“For to-day, we will have it *below* the pool in which we wish to bathe. Then the brook can carry away the dish-water without having it seep into the ground and find its way to mingle with the pool.”

The pail of water was hung upon the cross-pole, and fire was laid and lit in the fire-pit. The girls watched very closely as the Captain slowly placed the dry leaves, then the dried twigs, and lastly the dry wood that would burn quickly and start other wood burning in the stove.

While the water was heating, Mrs. Vernon showed the girls how to hitch and unhitch Hepsy. If either one needed to do it, she would understand just where all the pieces of harness fitted in. Hepsy was now given a drink and some oats, and turned out to graze about the plateau.

With five pairs of hands, the clearing away of the dishes did not take long. As they worked, the Captain planned the carpentry work.

“Don’t you think we ought to repair the old hut first?” asked she. “You see, we need some sort of protection for our dry groceries and other things.”

“Well, we can do that to-day, and begin on Hepsy’s shed in the morning,” suggested Julie.

“I doubt if we can complete all the work to be done on the old place in this afternoon’s few hours,” returned Mrs. Vernon.

“It doesn’t look as if it would take more than two hours at most,” argued Joan.

“We’ll begin now and then you can find out for yourselves,” the Captain said in reply.

All the tools they had brought were now unpacked and placed ready for use. Mrs. Vernon then said: “Now we must weed up all the stubble and wild-growth that has filled the interior of the hut. We may find the floor beams good enough to use again when the undergrowth is cleared away.”

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