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DOROTHY DALE
A GIRL OF TO-DAY

BY MARGARET PENROSE

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL," ETC

ILLUSTRATED

THE DOROTHY DALE SERIES

BY MARGARET PENROSE

DOROTHY DALE: A GIRL OF TO-DAY

DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL

(Other volumes in preparation)

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I. DOROTHY
- II. DOROTHY AT THE OFFICE
- III. A STRANGE ADVENTURE
- IV. A CLEW
- V. MILES BURLOCK
- VI. AT THE SWING
- VII. WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ORCHARD
- VIII. SQUIRE SANDERS AT SCHOOL
- IX. THE AFTERMATH
- X. APPLE BLOSSOM MAGIC
- XI. A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER
- XII. AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK
- XIII. A QUEER PICNIC
- XIV. THE SECRET
- XV. DOROTHY IN POLITICS
- XVI. THE GIRLS HAVE IT
- XVII. A GIRL'S WEAPON
- XVIII. DOROTHY IN DANGER
- XIX. A SURPRISE TRIP
- XX. AN EVENTFUL JOURNEY
- XXI. AT AUNT WINNIE'S
- XXII. THE PRICE OF TAVIA'S TRESSES
- XXIII. IN SOCIAL ELEMENTS
- XXIV. THE PAINTED FACE
- XXV. AN EMERGENCY CASE
- XXVI. DOROTHY'S COURAGE
- XXVII. THE LITTLE CAPTAIN--CONCLUSION

CHAPTER I

DOROTHY

The day of days had come at last: Dorothy would be the Daughter of the Regiment.

"Lucky you don't have to curl your hair, Doro, for the fog is like rain, and that's the worst kind for made curls," said Tavia.

"Oh, I do hope it is not going to rain!"

"No, it surely won't. But come, don't let's be late."

"There's heaps of time, Tavia. Oh, just see Briggs' new flag! Isn't it glorious?" cried Dorothy Dale.

"Not half as glorious as your old Betsy Ross. I'd be too proud to march if I had a real, truly Betsy. I think, anyway, it's prettier with the star of stars than with the regular daisy field of them," and Tavia tied her scarf just once more, that being the fourth time she had smoothed it out and knotted it over.

"I think red, white and blue look lovely over a white dress," commented Dorothy. "Your scarf is perfect."

"But you are like a live Columbia," insisted Tavia. "No one could look as pretty as you," and her companion fairly beamed with admiration.

"Come now, gather up the stuffs. Button your cloak all the way down, for we don't want folks to see how we're dressed," and Dorothy made sure that her own water-proof covered her skirts to the very edge.

It was Decoration Day, and the girls were to take part in the Veterans' procession.

Dorothy was the only daughter of Major Frank Dale, one of the prominent veterans of Dalton, a small town in New York state. Dorothy was in her fourteenth year, but since her mother was dead, and she was the eldest of the small family (the other members being Joe, age ten, and Roger just seven), she seemed older, and was really very sensible for her years,

The major always called her his Little Captain, and she showed such a practical interest in his business, that of running the only newspaper in Dalton, The Bugle, that few, if any boys could have made better partners in the work.

At housekeeping Dorothy was relieved of the real drudgery by Mrs. Martin, who had been with the major's children since the day when baby Roger was taken from his mother's side; and while the housekeeper was the soul of love for the motherless ones, it was Dorothy who felt responsible for the real management of the home, for Aunt Libby, as the children called Mrs. Martin, was fast growing old, and faster growing queer, in spite of a really good-natured disposition.

"It seems to me, Dorothy," the old lady would say, "Libby can't suit you any more. And Joe, too--he's mighty fussy about his victuals. Only my baby Roger loves the old woman!" and she would press the younger boy to her breast with a world of love in the caress.

Not far from Dorothy lived Octavia Travers, or Tavia as all the girls in Dalton called her, She had the reputation of being wild; that is she cared little for school, and less for study, but she loved her brother Johnnie and she loved Dorothy. She also had some love left for the woods; but like many another child of nature, she was misunderstood, and she was considered an idler by every one but her own father and Dorothy.

"Tavia is a rough diamond," Dorothy would tell the major, "and you need not be afraid of Aunt Libby's dreadful ideas about her. She's as good as gold. Lots of girls, who turn up their noses at her, might learn charity from the Tiger Lily, as they call her, just because she has a few freckles around her eyes. I think they make her eyes prettier, they are so brown--her eyes you know. And Daddy, no other girl in Dalton loves soldiers, dead or alive, as truly as Tavia does."

This last argument never failed to convince Major Dale, for a patriotic girl could no more go astray than could a star fall from the flag, he declared; so the Little Captain might go with Tavia if she desired.

So it was that Dorothy and Tavia were companions on Decoration Day. For weeks they had been getting ready--Tavia picking out the patches of daisies that would surely be in bloom in time, and Dorothy making certain that Mrs. Travers would not disappoint Tavia with her white things, as well as keeping track of Aunt Libby, who had Dorothy's own costume in hand. The dress was too short and had to be let down a whole inch, and of course, it could not be done up until after the alterations were finished.

There was always a big time in Dalton on Memorial Day, but this year it was to be made more memorable than ever before. The Grand Army of the Republic men were to come in from Rochester, the firemen were to turn out, and the school children were to have a place in the ranks, with Dorothy Dale as their leader. Besides this, the Dalton Drum and Fife Corps would make their first public appearance on this occasion, and a real review was to be given the procession, in the little square opposite the school, not very far from the cemetery where the soldiers' graves would be decorated.

No wonder, then, that Dorothy and Tavia were anxious about their appearance. Every school girl was expected to wear white, of course, and the bunting stripes of red, white and blue were bought in Rochester, by the school teacher, Miss Ellis, and sold to the children at actual cost--ten cents for each scarf.

One thing was certain, no other girls would have such flowers as Dorothy and Tavia had. Such syringias and such daisies! And the ferns that Tavia had growing back of the well for weeks!

Tavia had taken charge of the flowers for Dorothy, had made the big bouquet and had covered it with wet paper so it would keep fresh. The Little Captain had made certain that her companion would not be disappointed about her white dress, and although Tavia had to stay from school to wash it the day before, Dorothy went over to help her with the ironing, for Mrs. Travers managed somehow, to have an excuse for her failure in getting her daughter ready--she was that kind of helpless, shiftless person, who rarely had things ready for her children, especially in the matter of Tavia's clothes.

"Your dress looks real pretty," declared Dorothy, as the girls hurried along to the school.

"Thanks to you for ironing it," responded Tavia, with gratitude in her voice.

"I only helped, you did the skirt."

"That was plain, but the waist and sleeves--I never could have even smoothed them, to say nothing of making them look this way," and she straightened up to show the beauty of the garment.

At the school everything was in commotion. Some girls wanted their scarfs tied, others wanted to carry flags, some insisted they could not go out without hats, while Miss Ellis, always strict, seemed more stern than ever.

"Those who were here yesterday afternoon raise their hands," she commanded. Every girl but Tavia raised her hand.

"Those who were not here to rehearsal," went on the teacher, "cannot be in the ranks. You know I told you all to be here, or not to expect to go blundering along the roads, disgracing the school. Now, Miss Tavia Travers, please step back."

All the commotion ceased. Tavia the patriotic girl--she who had been searching for flowers in all sorts of dangerous and lonely places--not to march?

"Teacher," spoke up Dorothy, her cheeks aflame and her voice quivering. "It was not Tavia's fault. She--"

"Silence, Dorothy, or you will also lose your place."

"But teacher--" insisted the girl, with commendable courage, "I know Tavia--"

"Leave the ranks!" called Miss Ellis and Dorothy stepped down--and slipped into a seat alongside her weeping friend. "Sarah Ford, you may lead."

This announcement caused no less surprise than did the punishment of Dorothy. To think that Sarah Ford, a stranger in Dalton, whose father

was not even a firemen, let alone a soldier, should take first place!

It must be admitted that not every girl cared when Tavia left the ranks, for she was not a general favorite: but Dorothy! Major Dale's daughter! and he the head marshal!

With a conceited toss of her head Sarah Ford stepped to the front.

"She's mean," was whispered around. "Perhaps teacher knows only the meanest girl would ever take Doro's place."

Meanwhile two very miserable girls were crying their eyes sore in the back seat.

"Oh, Doro!" sobbed Tavia, "to think you lost it on my account."

"It was not on your account," wailed Dorothy, "but on account of an unreasonable teacher."

"Hush! She'll hear you."

"Hope she does," went on the crying girl. "I would just like her to know what I think of her. I don't care if I never come in this old school again."

"I never will," whispered Tavia.

The ranks were formed now, and the girls marched out. An unpardonable expression covered the face of Sarah Ford as she passed the tearful ones.

"There," hissed Tavia, sticking out her tongue at the unpopular leader. "Sneak!" she hissed again, and made the most unmistakable face of contempt and defiance at the haughty Sarah.

Many looked sadly at Dorothy and with pity at Tavia. Certainly these two girls deserved to march. Dorothy had done so much to help, in fact some of the girls knew she had helped the major with all the letter writing, inviting the Rochester men, and sending instructions to the firemen. And to think that now, at the last moment, she should be debarred!

And Tavia too, had been so happy at the prospect of the parade. Poor Tavia! Everybody knew she had a hard time of it, anyway, only for Dorothy, who always helped her out.

"Now, young ladies," said Miss Ellis, as the last girl passed out, "you may fall in at the end."

"I don't care to," Dorothy spoke up, wiping her eyes.

"But I say you must!"

"Do," whispered Tavia, "we can see them anyway."

This was enough for Dorothy. Both girls stood up, straightened out their crushed dresses, patted their red eyes with their handkerchiefs, and fell in at the end of the line.

"I don't care a bit," said Dorothy smiling. "I would just as soon be with you any way. And besides, we will be right next to the Veterans."

"Oh, good," answered her companion, "I would rather be there than up front. Only, of course, you should lead."

The Dalton Drum and Fife Corps was playing loudly. There seemed something very solemn about the lively tune in honor of the "Boys" who had answered their last roll call. Tavia's eyes were swimming, and not a freckle was to be seen beneath the deep red color that framed them.

Dorothy could not talk. It was so sad--that soldiers had to die just like other persons. She prayed her "Daddy" would not be called for years and years.

At the corner of the street the school children were joined by the main column. The veterans fell in--back of Dorothy and Tavia!

Major Dale was grand marshal, and of course came first. He looked surprised at seeing his daughter--his Little Captain, last in line with the children.

Then he glanced at Tavia. It was certainly something for which she was responsible he was sure, for Dorothy had told him she had remained away from school and missed the last rehearsal. "Halt," called the major, and his men stood still.

At a signal the entire ranks waited. Miss Ellis stepped up to the marshal smiling. She had evidently forgotten his daughter had lost her place.

"I need two girls to carry the end flags," he began. "These old men have all they can do to travel. The flags are not heavy--here, the two last girls will do nicely!"

Dorothy and Tavia stepped to the sides and gracefully took the flags from the hands of the aged soldiers.

The only girls who could carry real army flags! And walk on either side of the marshal leading the Veterans!

"If I only could stick my tongue out just once more at Sarah," whispered Tavia, as she crossed back of the marshal to her place.

"We have both got Betsy Ross flags now," said Dorothy, and in all that procession there were no prettier figures than those of Dorothy and Tavia, as they marched alongside the veterans, with the real army flags waving above their heads, stepping with feet and hearts in perfect

accord to the music of the Dalton Drum and Fife Corps' "Star Spangled Banner."

CHAPTER II

DOROTHY AT THE OFFICE

Could the sunshine of yesterday be forgotten in the clouds of to-day?

Major Dale was ill. Overfatigue from the long march, the doctor said, had brought on serious complications.

Early that morning after Memorial Day, Aunt Libby called Dorothy to go to her father. The faithful housekeeper had been about all night, for the major had had a high fever, but now, with daylight, came a lowering of temperature, and he wanted Dorothy.

"Now, don't take on when you see him," Aunt Libby told the frightened girl. "Just make light of it and pet him like."

Poor Dorothy! To think her own "Daddy" was really sick--and so many veterans already dead! But she must not have gloomy thoughts, she must be brave and strong as he had always taught her to be.

"Why, Daddy," she whispered, in a strained voice, kissing his hot cheek, "the honors of yesterday were too much for you."

"Guess so, Little Captain, but I'll be on hand at mess time," and he made an effort to look like a well man. "But I tell you, daughter, there's something on my mind; the Bugle should come out to-morrow."

"And so it will. I'll go directly down to the office and tell Ralph."

"Yes, Ralph Willoby is a good boy--the best I have ever had in the Bugle office. And that's why I sent for you so early. I want you to go down to the office and help Ralph."

"Oh, I'll just love to!" and Dorothy was really pleased at the prospect of working on the paper, in spite of the unfortunate circumstance---her father's illness--that gave her the chance.

"Not so fast now. You must pay strict attention--"

"But you are not to talk: you have had a fever, from fatigue, you know, and it might come back. Just let me go to the office and I will promise to return for instructions at the very first trouble Ralph meets."

Dorothy was already on her feet. She knew the very worst thing the major could do in his present condition would be to talk business.

"Now I'm off," she said, with a kiss and an assuring smile, "you will be proud of to-morrow's Bugle. 'All about Memorial Day!' 'Get the Bugle if you want the news!'" she added, in true newsboy style. Then Aunt Libby came in to wait on the major.

But Dorothy's heart was not as light as her smile had been. Her father looked very ill, and the bread and butter of the Dale household depended upon the getting out of the Bugle.

Her brothers, Joe and Roger, had been sent to school early to be out of the way, but to-morrow they might both stay home, thought the sister, for they could help sell papers.

"Father never would let the boys do it," she reflected, "but he is sick now, and we must do the very best we can. If he were ill a long time we would have to get along."

Only waiting to snatch up a sandwich left from her brothers' lunch,--for she knew the noon hour would be a busy time at the Bugle office,--Dorothy hurried out and over to Tavia's.

"I can't go to school to-day," she called in at the half opened door.
"Father is sick, and I must attend to some business for him."

"Bad?" queried Tavia, for she noticed the change in her friend's manner.

"Perhaps not so very. But you know he is seldom sick, and now he has a fever."

"Fever?" echoed Mrs. Travers. "Tavia, close that door this very minute! We cannot afford to catch fevers."

Dorothy felt as if some one had slapped her face. To think of her father giving any one sickness!

"Nonsense, ma," spoke up Tavia. "The major is only ill from walking in the hot sun. Come in, Doro dear, and tell us if we can help you."

"Aunt Libby is alone with him, and when the doctor comes she may need something. If your ma would not be afraid to let Johnnie run over about noon, I would pay him for any errand," spoke Dorothy.

"Oh, certainly, dear," the woman replied, now venturing to poke her uncombed head out of doors, thinking, evidently that the mere mention of money was the most powerful antiseptic known. "Of course Johnnie will be too pleased. I'll send him any time you say."

Secretly glad that her mother had so promptly overcome her fear of the fever, but also ashamed that her motive should be so flagrant, Tavia slipped on her things and joined her companion.

"I wouldn't keep you another minute," she began, "for I know just how

anxious you are. But I'm going along to help. I can go on errands at least, and keep you company."

"Oh, Tavia, dear, perhaps you had better go to school. On account of the trouble yesterday, teacher will think we are both defying her."

"Then let her send the Lady Sarah to find out," retorted Tavia. "I would show her if I had freckles on my tongue."

"Please don't talk so, Tavia, it is wrong--"

"Wrong? My father says there are some men in this world too mean to bother the law about. He says he knows one he would like to thresh only he is sure the sneak would not hit him back, but would have him arrested. Physical punishment is the kind for such, father declares. And that's just the way I feel about Lady Sarah. I would not tell teacher on her, for that would give her a chance to 'crawl,' as Johnnie calls being mean. So sticking my tongue out at her is the nearest I can come to physical punishment."

This doctrine did not in any way coincide with the upright views of Dorothy, but she knew argument would be useless. Besides, her head and heart were too full of other things to bother about school girl troubles.

"Are you going to print the whole paper?" Tavia asked, with amusing ignorance of the ways of the Great American Press.

"Why, no, dear, I could not print it. Ralph must do that."

"Oh, I know. Just put things in it."

"I may have to write some," Dorothy replied, with an important air. "The parade story was not written. Father intended to do that."

"Oh, goody!" went on the irrepressible Tavia. "Say that the meanest girl in school, Miss Sarah Ford, was chosen, at the last moment, to lead the girls, owing to the sudden illness of Miss Dorothy Dale, the most popular girl in school, who took a headache from the sun, but later recovered in time to carry a Betsy Ross flag, along with her dear friend, Miss Octavia Travers, the flags being presented to the girls by Major Dale. There now, how's that?" and Tavia fairly beamed at the very idea of having her "story" printed.

"I declare, Tavia, you can string words together, as father would say. But we cannot say anything against any one. That would bring on lawsuits, you know."

"Oh yes, I know. It's just as pa says: some folks are too mean for anything but a good thrashing--and that's Sarah. But I'll do anything I can to help you, and I hope I won't get the Bugle into any lawsuits."

Dorothy thanked her, and remarked that it was not likely.

By this time they had reached the newspaper office. Up two flights of stairs, over the post-office and drug store, the girls found the much-perplexed Ralph Willoby waiting anxiously for his employer.

Ralph was that kind of a young man whom people trust at once. He was known all over Dalton as a most zealous worker in the "Liquor Crusade," that was being very actively carried on in the town. He had a firm face, and deep, clear eyes. The major used to say his eyes could talk faster than his tongue--and he knew how to converse well, too.

He had his sleeves rolled up, and was bending over a pile of "copy" when the girls entered the office. He brushed his sleeves down and rose to hear their message.

"Father is ill," began Dorothy weakly, for inside the office its difficulties seemed to crush her.

"And we're going to get the paper out," blurted Tavia, trying to grasp the wonders of a real newspaper office in a single sweeping glance.

"Can't he come down?" and the young man's voice betrayed his anxiety.

"I'm afraid not," went on Dorothy. "He said we were to do the best we could. I was to help--"

"And I guess I'm to sell the papers. Hurry up and print some. Is this the printing press?" Tavia rattled on.

"But the parade," demurred Ralph, "it is not even written. I can manage the press well enough, but our reporter Mr. Thomas, has not come in this morning. I suppose yesterday was too much for him."

"I think I could write up the parade," ventured Dorothy. "I have often helped father read proof, you know."

"Perhaps you can," assented Ralph. "Here is a pencil and some copy paper. You had better try at once, as I will have to go to press earlier than usual to allow for 'snags,'" and he smiled to apologize for the newspaper slang.

Dorothy sat down at her father's desk. Somehow, she felt a confidence in her efforts when seated there, where he had worked so faithfully, and successfully, too, for the Bugle sounded always the note of truth and sincerity. She started at once to write up the parade. She should be careful, of course, not to mention the major's name, or her own (her father never did) and she hoped she could at least make a good composition or essay on Memorial Day.

Dorothy worked earnestly, for she meant to have that issue of the paper up to the mark, if her labors could bring it there.

Ralph had rolled up his sleeves again, and was busy with the press.

Tavia was "nosing around," as she expressed it. The door opened suddenly and little Johnnie Travers rushed in.

"The major sent me--to tell you--" and he had to get a new breath in somehow--" to tell you that old Mrs. Douglass is--is dead!" he finally managed to say. "He wants you to be sure to--to--put her in the paper."

"Nothing but live stuff in this paper, Johnnie dear," spoke up Tavia. "Mrs. Douglass was bad enough alive--but dead! We really haven't space," and, in spite of the real seriousness of the matter, for Mrs. Douglass was an important woman in Dalton, or had been up to that morning, Ralph and Dorothy were compelled to laugh at the wit of their friend.

"She was a big woman," said Ralph, adding to the mix-up in language, "and the Bugle is small. But being 'big' we cannot afford to slight her memory. There is so little time--"

"I can write that," said Tavia, shaking her head with a meaning. "And I know all about Mrs. Douglass and her high fence. Also the flowers behind the boxwood. Here, Doro, give me some of that paper--"

"Oh, you would have to see some of the family," interrupted Ralph. "Find out how she died, when she will be buried; if she said anything interesting--about charities, you know--"

"For mine!" sang out Tavia, adjusting her hat.

"Yes, your first assignment," ventured Ralph. "Dorothy must finish the parade, and I must attend to the typesetting, so if you could, really,--"

"Of course I can. Haven't I spent more time in the graveyard than at school? And don't I know what they say about dead persons?"

"Here lies Mrs. Doug,
She had a mug,
And none in Dalt could match it,
When she took sick,
She died that quick,
The Bugle couldn't catch it.'

"How's that?" went on the girl. "Shows it was our busy day and we hadn't time to catch the dead news, not Mrs. Doug's face, you know."

"Oh, Tavia, what slang!" cried Dorothy, and added: "you had better not go, you will surely say or do something--"

"I certainly shall both say and do something. Johnnie look out for your nose there. That machine is going and your nose is not insured. Yes, Doro, this issue of the Bugle will blow a blast both loud and shrill in memory of Mrs. Doug. You know she loved blowing, never missed a windy day to collect the rent."

It was useless to argue. Tavia was bent on doing the "obit." as Ralph called the obituary assignment. She went out with Johnnie at her heels.

"She's the jolly kind," commented Ralph, as the door closed on the brother and sister.

"Yes, and so few understand her," Dorothy replied. "To me she is just the dearest girl in Dalton, but others think differently of her."

"I've known boys like that," assented the young man. "They seem to live in a shell, and only poke their real selves out to certain persons, those who love them."

"I feel more like writing now," said Dorothy, brightening up, "Johnnie told me father is better--he was taking some nourishment, the child said, and when the doctor left Johnnie did not have to go to the drug store. That means, of course, that there is nothing new setting in. I think Aunt Libby should have kept Joe and Roger from school, but she thought the house would be quieter for father with them away. Aunt Libby is very nervous lately."

"I do hope the major will be well soon," answered Ralph. "He seemed so strong, but I suppose when sickness takes hold of something worth while the result is equally of consequence."

For some time the girl and young man worked without further conversation. Dorothy bent earnestly over her story, while Ralph was busy with the type, setting up the last item of news that would go in the week's issue of the Bugle.

Suddenly something like a scream aroused them.

"What was that?" asked Dorothy, but without waiting to answer Ralph hurried to the door. At that moment Tavia staggered into the office. Her hat was off and her face was very white.

"Oh, what is it, Tavia dear?" Dorothy cried. "What has happened?"

"I'm so--so frightened," gasped the girl. "Lock the door--that--that man--he may come in! He is in the hall."

Ralph was out in the hall instantly. The girls, clasped in each other's arms, could hear him running down the stairs.

"Oh, he is so rough and strong--he may hurt Ralph," whispered Tavia, too frightened to trust her own voice.

It seemed a long time to the girls, but Ralph was back in the room with them in a very few minutes.

"There was no one in the hall," he said, "and I looked up and down the street. No one--no stranger seemed to be in sight."

"Well, I was just coming up the stairs, and I couldn't see from the sun, when some one grabbed me," Tavia explained.

"Oh, Tavia!" interrupted Dorothy.

"Yes, indeed, a great big horrid man, with a hat over his eyes, and oh, he was dreadful!" and poor Tavia began to tremble again.

Ralph had his coat on now. That man should not get away!

"But you can't leave us," begged the girls. "He might break the door in."

"Then come down stairs and we will lock up. I must telephone to Squire Sanders."

"He isn't home," Tavia declared. "I saw him drive out as I went up William Street."

But Ralph insisted on giving the alarm.

"What did he say to you?" he asked.

"Why, he must have thought I was Dorothy. I saw him first just as I turned out of the Douglass' place, and he followed me all the way. At the lane--where it was really lonely--he called to me and I stopped. He said 'Where are you going?' I told him to the Bugle office. I didn't think anything of it. I am never afraid. Then he got nearer to me--"

"Why didn't you run?" asked Dorothy.

"Why, I never thought of such a thing. I thought maybe he was coming here with some news. Even when he started up the dark stairs after me I wasn't afraid. But when he grabbed me--"

"Oh!" screamed Dorothy.

"Yes, and he said: 'See here, Miss Dale, if you put one line in print about that old woman being dead--I'll blow the place up.'"

"He must be a crank," said Ralph. "Such people always drift into newspaper offices."

"Oh, no, I am sure he meant it, for he grabbed my notes. He saw me reading them in the lane," Tavia paused an instant. "And really, poor Mrs. Douglass was a good woman. The servant girl told me how she had worked for that Miles Burlock,--she had some special interest in him,--and you know how he drinks."

Unfortunately every one in Dalton knew only too well how Miles Burlock drank. Ralph had often helped him home, and then tried to get the man to talk of reformation, but it seemed like a hopeless case.

"Why should that strange man want the paper to keep quiet about Mrs. Douglass?" asked Dorothy.

"Something about Burlock, perhaps," Ralph answered, thoughtfully. "This man may be in with the drinking class, and perhaps if Burlock read anything or heard it, somehow he might go to the Douglass house, and they say Death is a great teacher. I know Mrs. Douglass often befriended Burlock."

"Then let him blow the office up!" cried Dorothy, with sudden courage. "Father never listened to threats! Tavia, can you remember some of the important facts? Quiet yourself and think it over."

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

Joe Dale was a credit to the family. Although only a boy in his tenth year, he possessed as much manliness as many another well in the teens. He was tall, and of the dark type, while Dorothy was not quite so tall, and had fair hair; so that, in spite of the difference of their ages, Joe was often considered Dorothy's big brother. Roger was just a pretty baby, so plump and with such golden curls! Dorothy had pleaded not to have them cut until his next birthday, but the boys, of course, thought seven years very old for long hair.

"Only for a few months more," the sister had coaxed, and, so the curls were kept. Dorothy always arranged them herself, telling fairy stories to conceal the time consumed in making the ringlets.

Both boys were to sell papers to-day, for the Bugle was out, and Dorothy had told her brothers of the necessity for extra efforts to help with money matters.

"You may go with one of the regular boys," Ralph Willoby instructed them. "He can tell you where you would be likely to get customers. Go into all the stores, of course, and look out for the mill hands, at noon time."

"I'll sell Bugles to-day," declared Joe, with that splendid manliness and real earnestness that makes a boy so attractive, especially to his sister.

"It takes a boy," Dorothy said proudly, as her brothers left the office, each with his bundle of papers, for, of course, Roger had to have a strap full the same as did Joe. Ralph was glancing over the paper. Evidently he was pleased with its appearance, for his face showed satisfaction.

"Is it all right?" Dorothy asked, secretly glad the "getting out" was finished, and that she would not have to write another parade story that day.

"First-rate," answered the young man, "and I think your father will be pleased. You had better go home and take him a copy, he may be anxious to see one."

"I'll go now," she told Ralph, "and I'll be back about noon, when the boys come in from their routes."

Dorothy passed out, and closed the door after her. Ralph went to the far end of the office, to finish folding the papers. Scarcely had he taken one sheet in his hand than he heard something in the hall.

A scream! And in Dorothy's voice!

Darting past the big press, and making his way to the hall door quickly in spite of the things that barred his path, Ralph pulled open the portal.

The girls were in a heap on the steps! Dorothy and Tavia.

The young man bent down anxiously. The pair seemed unusually still.

"Fainted!" he murmured, trying to lift Dorothy's head.

"Is he--go--gone?" whispered Tavia. "We are not hurt. We only made believe!"

"Oh!" sighed Dorothy. "I feel as if I were dying! I--I can't breathe!"

"Try to get on your feet," commanded Ralph. "The air will revive you!"

"There!" gasped Tavia. "There's his hat. I grabbed it when he put the handkerchief, with some stuff on it, to my nose," and the girl held up a gray slouch hat, the kind western men usually wear.

"That may help us," said Ralph. "But first you must both come down to the drug store. That stuff he used may sicken you. It has a queer smell."

Once on their feet the girls seemed all right, in fact as Tavia said, they had only "made believe" to prevent any further violence.

It seemed incredible that two girls should be way-laid in broad daylight, in the hall of the most public building in Dalton, but the fact was certainly plain--there was the dirty white handkerchief reeking with some drug, and besides, there was the hat that Tavia had taken from the man's head.

Ralph took the girls into the prescription room of the drug store, to see if they needed any attention, and there to the astonished drug

clerk, as well as to the equally astonished proprietor, Tavia tried to relate what had happened.

"It was the same man who grabbed my papers the other day," she said. "I saw him first as I came along William street. Joe and Roger had just gone in Beck's with their papers, and as I saw the man watching them I was afraid he might kidnap Roger. I was just thinking who would be best to call, when he caught me watching him, and then, like a flash, he sprang into that saloon at the corner. I thought he was frightened lest he would be caught, and I hurried down here to warn Dorothy. Well, no sooner had I put my foot inside the hall than he darted at me--"

"Where did he come from?" asked the drug store proprietor.

"Probably through the alley that leads from the saloon to the end of our building," explained Ralph. "He could easily dash into the hall from there."

"He was after papers," declared Tavia, "for just as he grabbed me he saw Dorothy. I was going to scream when he put that queer-smelling stuff to my nose."

"I screamed when I saw Tavia," ventured the frightened Dorothy, "but he had me almost before I could open--my--mouth. Tavia squeezed my hand and I knew she meant for me to be quiet."

"And if you had not closed your eyes he might have given you another dose," added Tavia, who somehow, seemed to know more than any one else about the wicked ways of the mysterious stranger.

"But how did he manage to get away so promptly?" asked one of the men, trying to get on the track for capture.

"Through that same alley into the saloon," Ralph said. "I will go at once, and have the place searched."

"As soon as he got the papers Dorothy had he went off," finished Tavia, "just as he did when he got my notes."

Leaving the girls to quiet themselves in the drug store, all the men, except the head clerk, started out to give the alarm.

This time a thorough search should be made, and even a reward offered by the town for the capture of the coward who went about trying to frighten helpless girls. There was certainly some hidden motive in his actions, as he had, each time, made an attack on some one connected with the Bugle's business, and the men quickly concluded his intentions had to do with an attempt to stop the Liquor Crusade.

Miles Burlock also figured in the case they decided, although how this stranger was mixed up in matters relating to Burlock, and what connection Mrs. Douglass' death could have with such affairs, was not plain.

The druggist warned Dorothy and Tavia not to tell their experience to any one, not even to the folks at home, for, he argued the stranger might get to hear they were after him, and so escape.

Dorothy readily agreed to keep silent, in fact it would not do for any one in her home to know of her experience, as the major was too ill to be worried, but Tavia did not see why her father should not be acquainted with the affair, as he always knew what to do. And why should other men be allowed to search for the man who had threatened her, when it was plainly her own father's special privilege?

"Well, if you feel that way about it," agreed the druggist, "tell your father to come down here to-night and perhaps he will be put on the committee."

This was quite satisfactory to Tavia, and after making sure that no more strangers lurked about, the girls made their way home.

"I never was afraid in daylight before," remarked Dorothy, whose face was still pale from the fright. "Let us hurry. There are the boys. Be sure not to say anything to them about the scare."

"Hurrah!" shouted Joe swinging his empty strap. "All sold out."

"Me too," said little Roger, who had his strap buckled so tightly about his fat waist, that he had hard work to breathe under the pressure.

"Hip--hip--" answered Tavia, continuing:

"Blow Bugle, blow,
Blow Bugle blow,
We're very proud
You blew so loud
To let the people know."

"Price five cents! Order now! That's the way city people put things in the papers about their goods," declared Tavia. "I think when I leave school I'll look for work in a newspaper office."

"Ralph said you did splendidly," said Dorothy, "I'm sure I never could have gotten along without you. But we are home now and--"

"No paper for the major," finished Tavia.

"There's a boy. I'll get one," said Joe, running off at full speed to overtake the newsboy, who had just turned the corner.

"Aunt Libby may be cross," whispered Dorothy, "for she has been all alone, and this being Saturday she would expect help."

"Mother won't say anything to me," Tavia decided, "for--well, I have something to tell her that will make her forget all about the work."

"Not about the--you know--" cautioned her companion."

"My, no," answered the other. "It's just about Mrs. Douglass' funeral. You know ma always goes to funerals, and I have found out that people may go to the house and see her. That will interest ma."

Joe was back with the paper, and was proud to have such an active interest in the Bugle. It seemed something to say it was his own father's paper, and then to have people remark what a bright sheet it was, and how it was never afraid to tell the truth.

"Let me give it to father?" he asked Dorothy.

"No, let me?" pleaded little Roger, "cause I ain't hardly seen him a bit lately."

"But you must not tell that we sold papers," directed Joe. "Father is not to know yet, you know."

"Oh, I won't tell," Roger promised.

"But you might forget," argued Dorothy.

"Nope," declared the little fellow, "I'll just let this strap keep squeezing me, then I couldn't forget."

"And have father ask where you got it," said Joe laughing.

"Then I'll tie a string round my finger," persisted the younger brother.

"I'll tell you," Dorothy concluded, "You just run in, give father a good hug, put the paper on his lap and run out again without saying a word. Then he will think you are playing newsboy."

This plan was finally decided upon, although Roger did think he would like to stay for "just a little while" to hear "Daddy" say "something about something."

They found the major anxiously expecting them. He feared something had happened--the press might break down, or the paper supply give out, Many things might occur when the man who ran the business was not there to keep ends straight. To say that the major was pleased was not half telling it--he was delighted. To think that they could get out a paper like that! And that his Little Captain should write up the parade. It really was well described.

Perhaps what astonished him most was Tavia's part in the issue. He laughed when Dorothy told how jolly Tavia was. Of course, there was no mention of the encounter with the strange man.

But that night Dorothy could not sleep. The excitement perhaps, or was it fear?

Oh, if that horrid man had never come to Dalton!

CHAPTER IV

A CLEW

As the druggist had anticipated, a citizens' committee was formed to run down the assailant of Dorothy and Tavia. The hat bore the mark of a Rochester house, so that was something of a clew. A hatless man ought to be easy enough to identify, but of course, he had managed to get a head covering somewhere; stole it, perhaps, from an open hallway.

But, after an exhaustive search, and much questioning of persons who might have seen the man, no news of importance was turned in at the committee meeting.

Mr. Travers had what he considered a tangible clew. Miles Burlock had told him that a man from Rochester had been hounding him for weeks, and that he pretended to know something of Burlock's business.

"Burlock, it seems," Mr. Travers said at the meeting, "was, in some way, connected with the Douglass family. There is money in the affair, however it may concern Burlock and Mrs. Douglass, and this stranger is after the cash."

"But what in the world has these children to do with that?" asked the chairman.

Ralph Willoby stood up.

"It seems, Mr. Chairman," he said, "that the first time the man gave us trouble was when we sent to learn something about Mrs. Douglass' death. He secured the notes to prevent us from publishing anything about the lady. Then he threatened to blow up the Bugle office if we did print an obituary. This did not intimidate us, and when the paper was out he waited for the little boys, sons of Major Dale, to harm them possibly. It was then that one of the girls saw and recognized him, and he, being sure of this, made off. A few minutes later he intercepted both girls on the stairs, tried to frighten them with some drug, took the papers from Miss Dorothy Dale, and again made his escape."

This was by far the most intelligent account of the affair yet given, and after its recital many of the men thought they could see a solution of the mystery.

"But how do you associate all this with Miles Burlock?" Ralph was questioned by the chairman: "I know Mrs. Douglass had a special interest in that man," went on Ralph. "I have known her to give him money to buy

respectable clothes with, and,--well there is no need to make public our brother's misfortunes. At any rate, it seems plain to me that this stranger was trying to keep the news of Mrs. Douglass' death away from Burlock."

"Has any one seen Burlock lately?" was next asked.

No one had; in fact his absence had been noticed by many present. He was not a common drunkard, and that was probably why such an interest was manifested in his possible entire reformation.

This was all of importance that occurred at the meeting, and the committee adjourned with instructions to continue their work.

It was a beautiful spring evening. The air was soft with blossoms, and a perfumed dew made all of Dalton like a rose garden.

Major Dale was improving rapidly, in fact he had recovered so quickly that this evening he insisted upon sitting out of doors for a few minutes. The doctor had discontinued calling, and said the attack was more of overfatigue from the march on Memorial Day than anything else. Both Dorothy and Tavia had been absent from school the past week but this was Sunday evening, and they would both go back to-morrow.

Dorothy went over to talk about it with her friend.

"Well, it will be something to have another chance at Lady Sarah," said Tavia, when Dorothy had finished telling her to be sure and have her father write an excuse to hand to Miss Ellis. "I don't mind school so much when there is something else to think of in between. And the girls will be tickled too, for they all love a good fight."

"Now, Tavia, you must stop that kind of talk if you are going to be a friend of mine," counseled Dorothy. "I cannot be considered your friend if you will not be--ladylike--"

"Like Lady Sarah," Tavia finished, laughing. "Well, all right, Doro dear," and she gave her chum a bear-like hug, "I'll be as good as pie,--lemon meringue at that,--so don't worry any more."

"Have you heard anything about the man?" Dorothy asked cautiously, for it was almost dark, and the girls were walking back to the Dale homestead.

"Not a word," answered Tavia, "except that father thinks he has gone out of Dalton altogether."

"And I have not seen Miles Burlock all week," commented Dorothy, "You know I had been trying to get him to reform."

"Everybody seems to be trying to do that."

"Well, Ralph told me he had seen Burlock crying like a baby one day

because a little girl asked him for a penny. And Ralph thinks perhaps there was some little girl in Miles' story,--a daughter maybe--and he suggested that I try my influence with Miles."

"Did he cry like a baby over you?" teased Tavia, with poor appreciation of her friend's efforts to help along the Liquor Crusade.

"Now please, Tavia, don't be absurd. There is something wonderfully winning about Mr. Burlock."

"Of course there is. Wicked people are always winners."

"I won't tell you one thing more!"

"Now Doro! Doro! You know I love to hear you talk that way. And if it were not so dark I could see your eyes show how deep they are, just like the Jacks-in-the-Pulpit I gathered in the woods yesterday. You are nothing like a wild flower, more like a beautiful pink and white hyacinth, that grows in the Douglass garden; but sometimes, when you pretend to be angry, you make me think of the wood flowers. They have such a way of blooming best when some other growing thing tries to stop them. Jacks-in-the-Pulpit grow right up through stones, and bloom in tangles of poison ivy."

"I am sure I have no right to compare myself with flowers," answered the other pleasantly, for she always admired her friend's poetic ideas, although other people might laugh at them.

"Shows she is thoughtful, anyway," Dorothy would tell herself, "and that is what Ralph meant when he said she could not make serious mistakes when she followed the advice of her kind heart."

The Dale house could be seen through the trees now. Voices were heard outside; perhaps the boys playing some games.

"I'll leave you here," said Tavia, "you are not afraid of bugaboos are you?"

"Not a bit," answered Dorothy, laughing. "Be sure to be on time at school to-morrow. No use adding coals to the fire."

"It depends on whether you intend to wash, bake, or iron. Now I am going to do all three at school to-morrow, so I may as well keep up a good, warm fire;" and giving her chum a hearty hug Tavia started off.

Dorothy stopped as she neared the piazza.

Surely that was a strange voice. A man was talking very earnestly to her father.

It was Miles Burlock!

CHAPTER V

MILES BURLOCK

What could that man want of her father?

And what was so mysterious about their conversation that reached her ears in spite of her attempting to enter the house without intruding upon her father's company?

Her name was being spoken, and why would Aunt Libby not open that door?

"There she is now," said Major Dale, as Dorothy gave one more knock.
"Daughter, come this way. We are waiting for you."

How hard her heart beat! And how foolish she was to be nervous!

"This gentleman," began Major Dale, "wants you to hear a story. It may be sad for ears so young, but perhaps the knowledge that you have helped Mr. Burlock to settle one point in this story may make it more interesting to you."

The faint moonlight, that now streamed from the spring sky, made a silvery glow upon the faces of the two men, and even in the shadows, that of Miles Burlock showed features firm and what might be called handsome. Dorothy had often seen him before, but he had never looked that way. His face was clearer now he was changed.

"Child," he said, extending his hand to her, "You need not fear Miles Burlock now. He is a man--no longer a slave to rum--but a wake at last."

"I am so glad!" Dorothy stammered.

"Yes, that day you took my hand, although it was not fit for yours, and the way you asked me to join in the League work came like a miracle of grace. Perhaps it is--because--because you are so like the child I lost."

He bowed his head, and for a moment, was silent, then he looked at Dorothy again.

"As you are the one chosen to help this man find himself--for he has been morally lost for years,--I feel it may be that you, too, may help me find my own child," Miles Burlock went on. "At any rate it is best that you should hear the story, for when men like us have passed away the children may be here to remember what others will be glad to forget about me--to forget that I tried to undo the wrong I had done to those lost to me now."

Major Dale opened the door to the sitting room, and there the man

continued his story.

"As a boy I was cared for by an over-indulgent aunt, and I have often thought that the fact of having lost my own mother might, in some way, make an excuse to heaven for me, for the boy or girl who never knows a mother has suffered more than mortal can count,--in ways more numerous than mortal can see, and a motherless babe is the saddest story in all human history. Well, money had been left for me, and this too, I believe, was an inherited wrong, for too early in life had I begun to feel independent. Later that indifference to discipline grew to recklessness, and then the final evil came in the shape of bad company."

Major Dale stopped the speaker for a moment and Dorothy was glad to move a little nearer her father. Somehow, this strange story was unlike anything she had ever heard, and while it fascinated her, it also frightened her, for she had not before known anyone who had lived such a wild life.

"And here is where your daughter, Major Dale, has come so strangely into my life," went on Mr. Burlock. "The good people of this town have been working hard to save such men as I have been--but no longer will I rank myself with such. That young man, Ralph Willoby, had pleaded with me in a way few could have resisted, but the trouble was, I was in the hands of a man who had been my evil genius for years, and no matter how firm was my resolve to get away from temptation, this tyrant would manage to put the poison into my hands. Of course I thought him a friend,--that was what he had always pretended to be,--but through the strange interference of this little girl,"--laying his hand on Dorothy,--"I have seen the light; the scales have fallen from my eyes."

The awful face of the villainous man, who had so frightened Dorothy on the stairs of the Bugle office, seemed to flash into that room. Could he be that evil genius?

"Yes, Major Dale," he went on, "you must have heard by this time that a man waylaid your daughter, grabbed the papers from her hands and tried to frighten her so that there would be no outcry until he had made his escape. Well, that man was no other than he who put liquor to my lips when I was a boy; who took me from my home when I was a husband, and made me sign papers that would leave my young wife helpless in all the affairs that she should rightfully control. Not satisfied with this record of villainy, he, at last, separated me from my wife and daughter, and though I have searched for years for them, it has all been in vain."

The man stopped. Tears were streaming down his pallid face and the sorrow of a lifetime seemed about to break the bonds of human endurance. Major Dale put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Cheer up, brother," he said, "There may yet be time. Life is with you still."

"Ah, but have I not searched all this week? And did not that man promise to take me to them?"

Dorothy had shrunk back when Mr. Burlock said the man who had put terror in her own life was the same person who had destroyed his happiness. Then it was as Ralph said,--Miles Burlock did figure in the mysterious case.

The evening was melting into night. Major Dale was still feeble from his illness and his daughter, quick to see the look of pain on his loved face, determined to stop the story for the time being.

"You must lie down, father," she said, putting her arm about him, "You know the doctor said to be very careful."

With a promptness that bespoke good breeding the visitor arose.

"Pray pardon me," he said politely. "I have been very selfish. I will not disturb you longer. I will come again to-morrow."

"We will be very glad, indeed, to help you, if we can," the major replied, rather faintly, for Dorothy had not spoken a moment too soon for his comfort.

"The real matter with which I would ask you to help me is the putting aside, now, of the money which is in my name, and which should be secured against enemies of my poor wife and daughter," said Miles Burlock. "I will never again trust anything to the uncertain time when they may be found, for I believe now they are being kept away from me by this same scoundrel, Andrew Anderson. It may be well for you to know his name."

"And where is he?" asked the major, his voice showing the feeling he could not hide, a determination to deal severely with the man who had threatened Dorothy.

"That is something I would not dare to tell even if I knew. My only hope of getting these affairs settled so that I may sometime make amends to my dear ones, is by keeping away from Anderson. It might not detain you too long to say that last week my friend, my counselor, and benefactress Marian Douglass, passed away. For years she held safely for me the principal of the money I had been wasting. Now that she is gone, and he knows it, I must at once make it secure in some other way. To-morrow, if you will allow me, I will come again and bring witnesses. No other man in Dalton would be so worthy of the trust. Thousands of dollars have almost made themselves in ways planned and carried out by Marian Douglass, who held this money both for me and from me, but now a part of this must be used to find my wife and my daughter Nellie, and then to run down their persecutors, for I have been a tool, simply, in the hands of those who took what I had and who have been trying for years to get the rest. If nothing happens to me to-night I will come to-morrow morning, after that we may tell the town who it was who tried to spoil the fair name of Dalton."

He pressed Dorothy's hand to his lips as he left. She felt a tear fall

upon it; and she knew that all her prayers and all her efforts to save this man from his evil ways had not been in vain, and with the happiness that comes always in the knowledge of good accomplished, a new resolve came into her heart--she would some day find Nellie Burlock.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE SWING

The strange story of the reformed man filled Dorothy's brain with exciting thoughts that night, and it was almost morning when she finally fell asleep. Even then she dreamed of all;--the fortune her father was to have in trust, the wicked man who had been trying to get it, and the poor wife and child who were hidden away somewhere, perhaps now starving. In her dreams she became Nellie, and she tried, oh, so hard, to find her own father, the dear major. The worry of it even in sleep gave Dorothy a severe headache, and when she awoke she found her nerves still throbbing and her brow hot and feverish.

"Oh, I'll be so glad to go to school to-day," she thought. "I am tired of all this worry, and it will be good to be back with the girls again."

"Doro, let me in! Let me in!" little Roger was calling at her door, and before she had a chance to finish dressing, her little brother had his soft white arms about her neck.

"Now, don't you look. You can't see until I've given you a quart of kisses, then you have to promise not to cry."

"Cry? What for?" she asked.

"Cross your heart, first," he insisted.

Then she saw that his curls were gone.

"Oh, darling!" she exclaimed, "who did it?"

"Jake, the barber. And daddy said so. He said you should not bother with tangles any more. Now don't you dare cry. You promised."

The girl took the little boy in her arms. Why did they do it just that day, when her head ached, and she had so many worries? Those beautiful curls! How she had loved them!

"Now Doro, you are going to cry, 'cause your eyes look like polly-wogs. And you must be glad that I'm a man, like Joe, now," and the boy sprang from her arms, and stood up like a "major" before her.

Then he was a "man," and her baby no longer. It was not the curls so

much, but taking her baby from her, that hurt so.

The loving mother-spirit, that had made Dorothy Dale the girl she was, seemed to grow stronger now with every tear that clouded her eyes. Yes, he had been her baby, and she had loved him with a wonderful love--sent into her heart, she always thought, by the mother in heaven who watched over them both.

"You have been a very good boy," she managed to say, "and Joe is a very good boy, so, if you can be like him, perhaps I will not be so lonely without the other Roger."

It was an hour later that Dorothy met Tavia in the lane and hurried to school with her. Of course she could not tell her friend what it was that made her so quiet, and it really was hard to keep a secret like that of the mysterious man from Tavia.

Perhaps she could tell her in the afternoon, by that time Mr. Burlock would likely have all his affairs attended to and then he said he would tell the town who the man was for whom the people had been looking.

As Dorothy and Tavia came into the schoolyard they saw Sarah Ford on the swing, that hung from a heavy square frame.

Down went Tavia's books on the grass.

"First for a run under!" she called, and instantly a line of girls formed, while Tavia led, of course, with such a "run under" that Sarah tried to jump to save herself from another like it.

"Hold fast!" shouted the next girl, who already had her arms up to the swing board. Then one after another they jumped to reach the board, and send it higher and higher until the girl on the swing threatened to turn over the frame.

"Oh, please stop!" she cried, "there goes the bell!"

One more "good push" sent her up into the air, and the girls were all gone--school was in.

For one moment Sarah held on and then jumped--into the remains of the janitor's rubbish fire!

Sarah Ford picked herself up. Her white dress was covered with soot and dirt. The classes were called by this time, and she could not go into the cloak room.

"Oh, that horrid mean thing, Tavia Travers!" she thought. "I will not give the girls a chance to laugh at me," and, darting out of the gate, she ran down the lane--away from school.

At the end of the lane the girl turned into an orchard and sank down under an apple tree.

Had she really run away from school? She could not turn back now, and what would her father say? He was so severe about school, he never would take any excuse.

The black soot had almost all blown off her dress. If she had not been so proud always, about her looks, perhaps she would not have noticed it much.

"Oh, what will I do to that girl!" she thought. "It was all her fault, and I'll lose my place too."

The sense of bitterness that filled Sarah Ford's heart was an entirely different sentiment from that which animated Tavia Travers when she made up, the "running under" game. The one was the sense of revenge, bitter and cunning; the other was a matter of school girl's fun, pure and simple.

Sitting there on the grass that revengeful spirit took the form of a resolve in Sarah's heart--to "pay back" Tavia Travers.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ORCHARD

Within the schoolroom more than one girl was wondering what had happened to Sarah Ford. Dorothy was worried. Hers was a nature that took all things seriously, while Tavia insisted on looking on "the easy side" as she termed Hope. She was hoping with all her heart now, that Sarah Ford would soon enter the room, but the morning wore on and no Sarah appeared.

At last recess came. Such whispering among the girls--so many theories advanced to account for Sarah's disappearance.

"Playin' hookey," was all Tavia said, in the way she had of making light of things.

"Perhaps she was hurt," whispered Dorothy to Alice MacAllister, a girl who had always been a close friend.

"I don't think so," said Alice, "Even had she fallen there was nothing she could strike on, and I have often jumped when I could not go one bit higher."

"She may have fallen on the rubbish heap," suggested one of the older girls.

At last school was dismissed.

"I'll wager we find her down the lane taking Widow Drew's apple blossoms," remarked Tavia, as she and Dorothy started for home. "She may be going to another party and want a change of decorations,--she wore honey-suckle last time."

"Hush!" Dorothy interrupted, "I thought I heard--"

"Some one moan? So did I," declared Tavia.

They listened a moment.

"There it is again," said Dorothy. "Oh, I'm sure that's Sarah!"

"It was down in the orchard," went on Tavia.

"Help! oh, help me!" came a voice, and this time there was no mistaking the cry; a girl was calling.

Springing over the fence, with Dorothy following her, Tavia ran through the deep grass to the spot from which the sounds came.

Under the apple tree, suffering and helpless, they found Sarah Ford.

"Oh, what has happened!" wailed Dorothy, bending over her.

"You have killed me!" gasped Sarah.

"Is it your ankle?" Tavia asked, trying to find out what could be done to get Sarah home.

"Yes, and you did it!" declared the suffering girl. "You gave me that last push. Oh,--oh. Get a doctor--or I will surely die!" and she buried her head deeper in the grass, writhing in agony.

"Can't you move, Sarah dear?" Dorothy pleaded, "If you only could, perhaps we could make a hand chair and carry you."

"Oh, it would kill me. My leg is surely broken. I can feel the bone. Oh, dear! Oh dear me! What shall I do? What shall I do?" and the unfortunate girl burst into hysterical weeping--

"I'll run and get a wagon--or a carriage--or something," Tavia said nervously, for she was very much frightened at Sarah's condition.

"They never could drive in this rough place," Dorothy sighed. "Listen! There is Joe. Call him. He will help us."

In a moment Joe Dale was beside his sister.

"Why, a man must carry her, of course," he declared promptly, "I just met Ralph Willoby--"

A shrill whistle from Joe, followed by his calling loudly the young man's name, soon brought Ralph to the scene.

"Oh, I am so glad it is you!" said Dorothy. "You will know just what to do, and we--don't want--a crowd."

By this time Sarah showed signs of fainting; her breath came in gasps and her face was very white.

"Run over to the spring Joe, and fetch a cup of water," Ralph commanded.

"Now, Miss Ford, you must put your head down flat on the grass--this way. There, that's it. Now try to straighten out so that you can breathe better."

But every move that the suffering girl tried to make caused her such pain that Dorothy fell upon her knees and tried to fan a breath into her white face, to prevent her, if possible, from becoming unconscious.

"Here's Joe, with the water," exclaimed Tavia, running to meet the boy, and hurrying back with the cool liquid.

Ralph pressed the drink to Sarah's lips, while Dorothy waited to bathe the pale face with what water might remain in the cup.

"Oh!" sighed Sarah. "I feel--better. I thought I was going to die."

"You were faint," Ralph exclaimed. "Do you think you can sit up now?"

Not waiting for a reply, the young man slipped his hand under the girl's shoulders, and the next minute he had her in his arms.

It was a sad little procession that followed him. Dorothy almost in tears; Tavia with eyes already overflowing, while Joe kept very close to Ralph, ready to offer any assistance in carrying Sarah to her home.

But Ralph was well able to manage his burden, for the girl was not heavy, and she helped herself some by keeping her arms clasped about his neck. Fortunately the Ford home was not far away.

"There's Mr. Ford," whispered Joe to Tavia, as they reached the gate, and at that moment the man on the porch raised his head from his paper, and saw them coming.

Mr. Ford seemed dazed--he did not stir for a moment but sat there staring wildly at the group now coming up the path.

"Sarah has hurt her ankle," Joe hurried to say, and as his voice roused the man from his frightened attitude, he sprang up and reached to take his daughter from the young man's arms.

"I had better put her on a couch," objected Ralph, "Her ankle seems quite painful."

"What has happened?" asked the father opening the door of the sitting room and making ready the couch under the window.

"The girls did it," gasped Sarah, "that girl there, Tavia Travers!"

"You!" exclaimed the man, making a threatening move towards the accused girl.

"It was an accident," interposed Dorothy, "we do not know how it happened; we found her under a tree in the orchard."

"They do know," persisted the injured girl "They sent me up so high!--oh, get a doctor, quick!"

Ralph had now placed Sarah on the couch, and "while Mr. Ford hurried to call his wife, Ralph and Joe hastened off for Dr. Gray, leaving the three girls together.

"Tell us about it," Dorothy pleaded, not wanting to leave Sarah until she had obtained some idea of how the accident had occurred.

"I'll tell Squire Sanders," answered the girl on the couch, "and then you will be arrested, every one of you who--who tried to kill me!"

"Come!" whispered Tavia to Dorothy as Mrs. Ford appeared. "It only makes matters worse for us to be here."

Then as the mother fell weeping by the couch Tavia and Dorothy left the room.

CHAPTER VIII

SQUIRE SANDERS AT SCHOOL

Dorothy had always been able to influence Tavia, and to show her that to do right would be best in the end, although the doing of it might, at the time, seem very hard, and very unreasonable; but all her efforts now to induce her friend to go with her to school that afternoon and make the necessary explanation to Miss Ellis, were without avail--Tavia absolutely refused to go.

"No matter what comes of it," Dorothy told herself, as she walked sadly along the path, through the lane back to the schoolyard alone, "I'll stand by Tavia. She meant no harm, and was no more to blame than any one else. But I do wish, she had come this afternoon. It looks as if she were afraid or guilty, to run away from it all."

[Illustration: "WELL, THIS MATTER MUST BE FULLY INVESTIGATED," DECLARED THE SQUIRE]

The fact that Miles Burlock had not appeared at the Dale home that morning, according to promise was of little interest to Dorothy now. Something might have happened to him. Of course, he certainly seemed determined to settle the business at once, but Dorothy's head and heart were too full of her school friends' troubles to give much thought to the Burlock matter. Major Dale had appeared concerned about it however, and had questioned Dorothy as to whether any one had mentioned to her, at school or on her way there, the fact that the strange man, likely Andrew Anderson, had been seen again in Dalton.

"Be very careful to go around by the road," her father had cautioned her on leaving, "and come directly home from school as I will be anxious," he said, when he kissed her good-bye.

But Dorothy reached school safely, and was soon surrounded by a crowd of curious, and not too thoughtful girls, whose incessant questions added much to her nervous condition. Sharp pains shot through her head, for the excitement of the day had caused the ache of early morning to become a bad attack of neuralgia.

"Please do not bother me so," she pleaded, as the girls plied question after question.

They had heard, of course, of the accident, but how it had happened, and what had become of Tavia, whether she run away or been arrested--these and many similar queries kept the excited scholars buzzing about Dorothy like bees about a hive.

"I do not know how it happened," she insisted, "I wish I did. We found her under the tree, and helped her home. That is all I know about it."

The class took its place. Miss Ellis began to speak but was surprised at that moment to see old Squire Sanders enter the room.

"Oh, oh, he's after Tavia!" whispered May Egner to Dorothy. "I'm glad she is not here."

"Take your seats, young ladies," Miss Ellis directed the class, and then the squire assuming his business attitude, that of holding his black-thorn cane well out in front of his left foot, which member in turn was in advance of its mate, and planting the cane down firmly twice, he began:

"I've come here to investigate a complaint" and he rapped his stick noisily on the floor. "Where's the girl who threw Sarah Ford from the swing, and broke her ankle?"

"Why," stammered Miss Ellis, "I have not heard of any such occurrence. Does any young lady here know anything of it?"

Dorothy was on her feet instantly. Her flushed face betrayed the emotion she tried bravely to hide, but when she spoke her voice rang with truth

and confidence.

"Sarah Ford was not thrown from the swing," she began. "We found her suffering under the tree in the orchard. When the bell rang this morning she was on the swing, and I was the last girl to enter the hall. I saw her on the swing then."

A pin, dropped, might have been heard in the room. It was so like a trial to have Dorothy there "giving testimony."

"Well, that ain't the story I have," drawled the squire. "Where's that wild harum-scarum Tavia Travers? She's the one that's blamed."

"Tavia Travers!" called the astonished Miss Ellis, but of course there came no answer.

"Absent!" answered a girl from the back row.

"Can you tell us where she is?" Miss Ellis asked Dorothy.

"At home I believe," answered Dorothy simply.

"Well, this matter must be fully investigated," declared the squire, "thoroughly and fully investigated. Girls or boys who cut up tricks must be punished. Dalton will not stand any nonsense when it comes to life and limb," and again the cane thumped the floor. "I propose, as squire of the borough, to run this thing down to the very end. School girls now-a-days put on too many airs--copyin' after college rowdies with their pranks!"

While the teacher and squire were talking in the hall the pupils took advantage of the opportunity to express their opinions of the case, and what were meant to be whispered remarks soon reached a pitch of voice that called for remonstrance from the squire; and he rapped his cane vigorously on the door. This had the effect of restoring order, and also of bringing punishment upon the entire class for the remainder of the afternoon.

"To think," began Miss Ellis severely, on returning to the room, "that I should be so disgraced. Not enough to have one or two girls accused of--of a crime--but that the rest should so misbehave before an officer of Dalton! I shall be obliged to send to the president of the Board; something I have never before had to do. But this matter must be thoroughly investigated. I am very sorry, Miss Dale, that you should be implicated, sorry for your father's sake. But it all comes of associating with girls who--who will not be governed by those in proper authority," and the teacher adjusted her glasses, satisfied that she at least held a position as head of Dalton School with dignity and "authority" that such an office required.

Poor Dorothy! Her aching head was now bowed on the desk before her, and her sobs were so pitiful, even the most thoughtless girl in the room was silent and sad to see her weeping so.

Alice MacAllister sat upright at her desk. Her strong face assumed a daring expression--that of defiance. Alice was counted a good-natured girl. Something of a romp, perhaps, for her companions often called her "Mack" and she showed a preference for the boyish nickname.

But to see Dorothy weeping so, accused unjustly!

Alice raised her hand for permission to speak. Miss Ellis signed for her to go on.

Again that sense of suppressed excitement was felt in the class room. Something else was going to happen.

"Miss Ellis," began Alice in a firm voice, "Dorothy Dale is not to blame--"

"That is not for you to decide."

"But we were all there, and know as much about it as she does."

"At least she knows enough to keep her place. Sit down at once," and the teacher looked very much annoyed.

"Not until you have heard me," and Alice raised her voice a little.

"Go on! Go on!" murmured the girls about her. "Make her listen."

"Sarah Ford was never hurt in the school yard," declared Alice. "My brother saw her running down the lane just as the bell rang, and she could not stir when Dorothy and Tavia found her."

"Be silent this moment!" called Miss Ellis, rapping her ruler on the desk. "Your brother's story is of no account in this matter."

Dorothy raised her head. The room was in a commotion. Miss Ellis seemed too surprised at the girl's audacity to try to restore order. Perhaps no one was more surprised than Alice herself, for when she spoke first she had no idea of going so far,--it was that remark reflecting upon her brother's veracity that angered her.

Then the sobbing of Dorothy--Alice could not stand it to see her crying that way; better brave dismissal than sit by and listen to that.

With one glance towards Alice--a glance full of gratitude and love. Dorothy arose and asked to be excused.

"I must go home--" she stammered "I have such a sick headache."

"Very well," replied the teacher. "You may go."

"May I also be excused?" asked Alice, not boldly but with politeness restored to her voice.

"By no means," declared Miss Ellis. "I will not brook such insolence."

"I thought I might help Dorothy home," Alice explained, taking her seat again.

Meanwhile Dorothy was looking for her hat in the cloak room. It was a small stuffy place, and the day was unusually sultry, so that Dorothy felt dizzy there, trying to find her hat--and trying to find--Oh! what was the matter? She could not see! Oh, if some one would only come!

Then, with her hands before her, she stumbled and fell,--and all became a terrible blank.

CHAPTER IX

THE AFTERMATH

What a day that had been at the Dalton School for girls! Sarah Ford was at home suffering from a badly sprained ankle; Dorothy Dale had been taken home ill from over-excitement, and Tavia Travers, for whom Squire Sanders had been searching, was not to be found anywhere.

The interference of Squire Sanders worried Miss Ellis. A man, especially an official, knows absolutely nothing about girls and their ways, and he is sure to antagonize them in any attempt to force them to betray one another's confidences.

But while the teacher, alone in the school, was reflecting upon the tasks she should soon undertake to perform; Dorothy lay in her little room, hot and feverish, with Aunt Libby beside her, bathing the throbbing head tenderly with cold water and vinegar.

"You've been doin' too much," muttered the old nurse, "a-runnin' newspapers, helpin' drunkards, teachin' housework to that Tavia, though 'twas a charity to show the child how to iron her own frocks. But you see deary, it was too much for you, you as has always had Aunt Libby at your elbow," and the old linen napkin, the softest of those ever ready for headaches, was dipped again into the blue bowl of cool water and strong vinegar, then pressed lightly to the feverish brow. "Try to sleep a bit now," went on the nurse, as Dorothy looked gratefully into the wrinkled face. "All you want is rest, just a good, quiet rest."

Dorothy closed her eyes. They burned so she pulled the napkin from her forehead down over the hot lids. That eased the pain, and perhaps she could sleep, she thought.

Watching her patient closely for a moment, Aunt Libby moved noiselessly to the window, pulled down the shade, pushed the chair against it so the

breeze might not disturb it, left the room.

As she turned in the narrow hallway her gingham skirt brushed the crouching form of Joe, who had been waiting at his sister's door, but the aged lady did not know it.

Joe and Roger had been forbidden admission to their sister's room. She was to be left entirely alone, in absolute quiet; even Major Dale, who was assured the attack was not more than a sick headache, did not presume to disturb his daughter, but Joe had been waiting there in the hallway. He had an important message to deliver to his sister, one that "would not keep."

The boy had removed his shoes and now he stole noiselessly into the room.

"Dorothy! Dorothy!" he whispered. "Are you asleep?"

Dorothy pushed the napkin from her eyes, and raised her arm to invite her brother's kiss.

"Poor, dear Doro!" he murmured, pressing his cheek to her hot brow. "I am sorry for you--every one is," and he kissed her again. "But I have to hurry. Aunt Libby may come back."

He was looking for something in his blouse.

"I had a note from Tavia," he said. "She has gone away--"

"Gone away!" gasped the sick girl.

"Oh, only for a little while. Where is that note!"

The boy unbuttoned his waist, he even shook it out straight from the string, but no note was to be found in its folds.

"I could not have lost it!" he said, now quite alarmed that the note should have gotten out of his possession.

"What was it about?" asked Dorothy.

"Why--about--about why she went away," stammered the boy, helplessly.

"Don't you know what was in it?"

"No, it was sealed, and no one but you was to open it. Where could I have dropped it? I had it--let me see."

The fear that he had dropped the missive where it might be picked up by those not in sympathy with Tavia, and her troubles, now troubled Joe sorely. He had promised the girl, most particularly, that he would deliver the note to his sister that night, and he waited at Dorothy's door, risking the displeasure of Aunt Libby in keeping that promise. But

now the very worst thing had happened--the note was lost!

"Never mind," whispered Dorothy, "perhaps you will find it in your jacket. I am sure she only said good-bye; there could not have been anything so very important in it."

"But if any of the others should get it," he sighed. "They could find out where she went, and she most particularly wanted to hide for a few days."

"Hide!"

"Yes, she told me she was sure Sarah would wake up in a few days and make a 'clean breast of it.' Tavia declared she had done nothing wrong herself, and that she was not afraid of anybody, but, she said, there was going to be trouble, and she never ran into trouble when she could run the other way."

"Well, dear," said the sister, "you had better go to bed now. I am so tired and I feel a little like sleeping. If you find the note, bring it to me in the morning; if you do not find it, there is no need to worry. Tavia will be back to see me as soon as she hears I am sick," and, giving the boy a good night kiss, Dorothy closed her eyes, while Joe crept out of the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

CHAPTER X

APPLE BLOSSOM MAGIC

Two long, dreary days had passed. Dorothy was well again, but, acting upon the advice of Miss Ellis, she remained away from school, to grow strong and take a little rest in the fresh air; to be out of doors as much as possible, the teacher said.

Alice had been to see Dorothy, and had assured her that "every thing was all right," even the misconduct of Alice in "talking back" had been forgiven, the girl herself declared.

But there was no explanation offered as to the accident to Sarah Ford. That was still a mystery to the school girls. Neither had Tavia returned to Dalton. She was visiting her aunt in Rochester Mrs. Travers announced.

Major Dale was at his office again, and the boys were not yet home from school, although the dismissal hour had passed.

There was a rush through the vines at the side of the porch--the next moment Tavia had Dorothy in her arms.

"You poor dear!" she exclaimed between her kisses. "To think that you have been sick all alone--without me!"

Dorothy leaned back in her chair--happy.

Tavia was not so much larger or older than she, but just at that moment she came like one all powerful; Tavia had such a way of being and doing.

"And all on my account," went on Tavia. "I declare you have gotten thin," and she spanned the bare wrist of Dorothy lovingly. "You never wrote, of course, as I asked you to."

The lost note! Perhaps other important matters had been overlooked in its disappearance.

"Is Sarah able to play leap-frog yet?" went on Tavia facetiously. "I hear Squire Sanders has been inquiring for me--just me, Tavia Travers. Ahem! Also my goodness me! Sakes alive! If I had only known the worthy squire wished to hold converse with this--me, you know, I certainly should have postponed my vacation. Who knows what I have missed?"

Dorothy's face showed how pleased she was; it was so good to hear Tavia rattle on that way. As Ralph Willoby had said, her heart was right, and so she made few mistakes where love could be counted on as her guide.

Tavia was stroking Dorothy's head affectionately. The two girls sat on the rustic bench, Dorothy with her head resting upon the other's shoulder.

"I made a discovery in Rochester," said Tavia, when she had exhausted every possible point, covering the sickness of her friend, the fainting in school and all that preceded and followed that occurrence. "Yes, I found out that a woman there, who did washing for my aunt, is named Burlock, and that she has been deserted by her husband--"

"Has she a daughter?" interrupted Dorothy.

"I don't know about that. Aunt Mary said she was such a strange woman, all the time moving, and no one ever could find out just where her rooms were. The way one had to do, to get her to do washing, was to apply to the Charity Bureau."

"But the Bureau must have her address," said Dorothy much interested in the story.

"Well, Aunt Mary said they could not keep track of her either. They know she is a good honest woman, who seems always to be in some trouble--looking for her husband, of course. I made up my mind that the man she is looking for is your friend Miles. Have you seen him lately?"

"No," replied Dorothy, thoughtfully.

"And I've got more news," went on Tavia, "Miss Ellis has planned a

picnic for Monday. She is going to take our class to Glen Haven Falls. Do get strong and come, if you don't go I will not."

"Oh, I am sure I will be all right by that time," answered Dorothy, "in fact I am well now. I am only staying out of school because Miss Ellis thought it best. I wonder, Tavia, how we could ever think her unfair. She is the nicest woman--why, when she called she brought me jelly, and one of her splendid roses that she prizes so much. I felt almost guilty to have spoken of her, as I did, about the procession on Memorial Day."

"Well, she has not brought me jelly or roses yet," replied Tavia, "and I hardly think she would, even had I the good fortune to be sick in bed. Yes, I mean it! I would like to see what would happen if I took sick. But no danger. Aunt Mary said she would rather feed two men than give me what I call enough. It is not really enough, you know, but I call it that," and she stretched out on the bench to show how "deliciously lazy" common health makes a girl.

"You certainly do your appetite justice," said Dorothy laughing. "Aunt Libby says it's one thing to eat, and another thing to make your eating 'tell.' Now, you make your food--"

"'Tell.' Certainly I do, and make it 'tell' out loud too. I weigh--how much do you think?"

"About ninety?"

"One hundred and five," declared the girl. "I wish you could go away for a week. I am sure you would pick up and get the peaches back in your cheeks."

"We will go away in vacation time," replied Dorothy. "This month will not be long going around."

"Now I must run back home. I have not had a chance to tell mother a bit of news. You know it was the luckiest thing, ma wanted me to go to Rochester, and when the fuss came all I had to do was clear out. Ma had been waiting for me to get a new dress and she was so tickled when I said I would go in my old one. You see, Dorothy, Aunt Mary gives us lots of things, and no one had been out this spring. Nannie, that's my cousin, is just a little larger than I am, and oh, you should see the scrumbunctious dress I am going to wear to the picnic! It is perfectly--glorious!" and Tavia wheeled around on her toe, threatening her boasted one hundred and five pounds avoirdupois with disaster.

With a promise to be back again in the evening Tavia left Dorothy and hurried across the fields to her home.

"Things seem to be straightening out," thought Dorothy. "Every thing is all right at school, Tavia is back, now if Sarah would only tell--I have a good mind to run over to see her."

It was a warm afternoon and Dorothy had no need to bother with wraps.

Aunt Libby was at the side porch so that in passing Dorothy called to her she would be back in a short time, then she crossed through the orchard, going under the very tree in the shade of which Sarah had been found suffering. Dorothy stopped and looked up into the branches. They were very low, some of them, so low that in fruit time girls could pick the apples without climbing for them.

The blossoms were almost gone. Small sprays lay faded on the grass where careless hands had scattered them.

Somehow, it seemed to Dorothy that the tree knew all about the accident; if trees could only talk, she thought. Then, picking up a spray of the freshest blossoms, she hurried on.

To Dorothy's surprise Mrs. Ford was very cordial in her welcome. Dorothy had feared the mother of the injured girl might not be so pleased to see her.

"Walk right in," said Mrs. Ford, opening the door. "I am sure it will do Sarah good to talk with you. She is so lonesome and talks in her sleep about the girls," and she led the way to her daughter's room.

The girl was now sitting up; her injured foot rested on a cushioned chair, while her face still showed signs of suffering.

"Sarah, dear," began Dorothy with an affectionate embrace, "I am so glad to see you up."

"Are you?" asked the other mechanically.

"Yes, indeed," ignoring her cold manner, "we have been so worried about you."

"We? Who?" and Sarah toyed nervously with the coverlet that was thrown over her knees.

"Why all of us; the girls at school. We hope you will soon be able to come back."

"I will never go back. I have had all I want of Dalton School," and Sarah tossed her head defiantly.

"Here is a spray of apple blossoms. I brought them from the orchard. They are so sweet," said Dorothy, "I thought they might make you think you were out of doors, when you shut your eyes and smell of them."

She offered the spray to Sarah, but the girl made no sign of accepting it. Dorothy was disappointed. She did not mind the sick girl being fretful, but she had not expected her to be rude.

A rather awkward silence followed. Dorothy had determined if possible, to reach the heart of this queer girl, but her best efforts seemed unsuccessful.

"Well, I had better go," said Dorothy at length, still holding the blossoms in her hand, and standing beside Sarah's chair.

She turned to leave.

"Good-bye," she said. "I hope you will be better soon."

But Sarah caught her dress. "Oh, Dorothy, do not leave me," she wailed. "I am so miserable, so unhappy! Throw the apple blossoms out of the window and come back to me. I need someone! Oh, I feel as if I shall die, all alone here!"

Sobs choked her words, and she seemed struggling for breath.

"Shall I call your mother?" Dorothy asked anxiously.

"No! no!" cried the sick girl. "I only want you. Dorothy Dale help me-- you must help me or I shall die," and again Sarah broke into hysterical sobbing.

"What is it, Sarah dear?" pleaded Dorothy. "Tell me how I can help you," and she bent down closer to the weeping girl.

"Oh, I do not know. I have--Oh, Dorothy have you ever tried to injure another?"

"Why, no, dear, and I am sure you have not, either."

"Oh, but I have indeed! I can not bear the pain any longer. I must tell someone--you. You will know how to help me."

A very sad face looked up into Dorothy's. The brown eyes that had always been thought so proud and haughty were now "begging" for help, for pity, and for counsel.

"Tell me about it," said Dorothy, taking a trembling white hand in her own, which was scarcely more steady.

"Did--they--arrest Tavia?" asked Sarah, the words seeming to choke her in their utterance.

"Why, no. Of course they did not," Dorothy replied. "I just left Tavia a half hour ago, and she was as light hearted and happy as ever I have seen her. That little trouble at school did not last long."

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Sarah. "The thought of it has just--haunted me!"

"About the accident?" asked Dorothy, trying to help Sarah unburden her mind.

"Yes. I really did not mean to do so wrong. But when I found you were

all gone, and I tried to jump--"

"Yes, of course it was very wrong of Tavia to send you up so high just as the bell was going to ring," and Dorothy pressed the other's hand encouragingly.

"Then when I saw my white dress, all black from the ashes, I ran away!"

"Now do not excite yourself, dear," cautioned Dorothy, for she saw how Sarah's face had flushed, and did not like to hear her raise her voice so.

"No, it will not hurt me. The pain of it has been killing me ever since, but now it will go--with my confession!"

"Hush!" whispered Dorothy, "your mother is in the hall."

"Poor mother!" answered Sarah. "She has tried every way to help me, but I could not tell her. It seemed so terrible!"

"But how did you hurt your ankle?" asked Dorothy bluntly.

"I fell out--of--the--tree! I did not mean to do it. I was up there hiding from those who passed in the lane, and all at once the awful thought came to me that I could slip and blame it on Tavia. But I did not mean to do it that way. Oh, Dorothy, how dreadfully I have been punished!" and the sick girl fell to weeping again.

"Never mind dear. We all do wrong sometimes--"

"No, Dorothy Dale, you never do. I have been jealous of your love for Tavia. I have loved you from the first moment I saw you--that day helping a poor drunken man to his feet. I said then I would make you love me, but see how I have failed. You will hate me now."

"No, Sarah dear. You are better and nobler this minute than any other girl in Dalton, for no other likely, has had to make the heroic effort to do right that you have been obliged to go through with. You know the joy there is over one lost lamb when it is returned to the fold?"

Sarah leaned back, and looked up full into Dorothy's face.

"I knew you would know just what to say to me," she whispered. "Dorothy Dale you are--an--angel," and the big, brown eyes sent out such a look of love, admiration and, at last--happiness.

"It all seemed worse to you, thinking of it here, alone, with no one to say a word to you," continued Dorothy, consolingly. "And then of course, your father was angry. That only showed how fond he is of you."

"Yes. It seems every thing helps one to do wrong. I really never accused Tavia of doing it, only that time when we came in, and then I was so sick and frightened, I had no idea, then, that father would take it all

in earnest. But he rushed right off, and when I heard Squire Sanders had been at the school--oh, Dorothy how can I tell you how I felt!"

"But it is all over now," spoke Dorothy soothingly, "and I will take care that every girl in school knows the greatest part of the trouble came from a mistake."

"But I can never go back to that school again--"

"Why, of course you can. I have to make an explanation myself when I go back. You know how hasty Alice is; well she got herself in trouble on my account, and I feel I must say something about it. I was too sick then to know just what to say. So, now that Tavia is back, she will have to give an excuse. Then I can say how the whole trouble was more of a mistake, than anything else, and how we were all really somewhat to blame; perhaps one as much as another."

CHAPTER XI

A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER

The setting right of Sarah's wrong--a task which Dorothy had so willingly volunteered to perform,--was by no means so simple a matter as she had attempted to make it. School girls are apt to be fond of excitement, and this bit of trouble brought with it so many interesting experiences--the visit of a real squire, the "insurrection" of Alice; Dorothy falling ill in the cloak room, and that particularly novel occurrence: the disappearance of Tavia Travers. Surely all these features would seem to mark a red letter week on the calendar of "interesting events" at Dalton School. But that was not to be the end of it.

Dorothy intended to make such an explanation to the class, that the entire affair would be cleared up without too much blame resting on Sarah.

A conference with Tavia, held directly after her pathetic interview with Sarah, resulted in the former declaring she would shoulder any blame that could be made to fit her. "For a girl with a sprained ankle, and a bad case of delicate conscience, has troubles enough without inviting more," Tavia told Dorothy. "Besides," she said further, "it really was my fault, for I had determined to get even with her that day, and when I sent her upon the swing I really did not care whether she 'busted' through the clouds or not; I simply sent her flying.

"So, Doro," she concluded "you say whatever you please, and I will 'stand' for it. Only be sure not to let Miss Ellis know you are going to make a speech, for she has 'cut out' all speeches--except her own."

"Tavia, Tavia!" exclaimed Dorothy indignantly, "where ever did you hear such common slang!"

"I picked it up with the 'goods' at Aunt Mary's," replied Tavia laughing, for she really only made use of the expressions to "horrify" Dorothy. "Now," she continued, "be all ready for the picnic. We are only to have a half session, and then go to the Falls."

That evening, after tea, Dorothy found a much-longed-for chance to "visit" her father--talk with him in his own little study, upstairs and away from all disturbances. Since her indisposition the major had not bothered his daughter with any cares of the house or with the children, neither had he talked with her about the Burlock affair; but now, she had something to tell him--Tavia had heard of a woman living in Rochester, of that name--Burlock. What if it were the right party? The one so long sought for by Miles Burlock! And would the major let Dorothy go with Tavia to Rochester, and look for them--the poor mother and little Nellie!

Dorothy found her father in his study waiting for her. How well he looked now, she thought, for the old hale and hearty look, that which so often characterizes the veteran soldier, had returned to his face, making it handsomer than ever because of a lighter shade having settled on his head--he was getting gray the daughter was quick to notice.

"You look better, Little Captain," he said in greeting her.

"I was just thinking the same thing of you," replied Dorothy, laughing.

"That was a case of great minds running in similar trenches," said the father.

"Now, we are going to have a good, long chat," began Dorothy, leaning against the arm of the major's chair so that her head touched his shoulder. "First, I want to tell you some news Tavia has heard of a woman in Rochester named Burlock!"

"Burlock!" repeated the major, and he looked pained somehow; distressed at the mere mention of the name.

"I thought perhaps--it might be the party you--that is, the woman wanted in the Burlock matter," faltered Dorothy.

"I am afraid, daughter," said the major very solemnly, "you have been bothering your young head about affairs much too grave for you to handle. I have always regretted sending you to the Bugle office that morning, so many complications seemed to follow that experiment. Not but what you got out a splendid paper--better than this week's issue for that matter," the major hurried to say, for he noticed a look of disappointment come over Dorothy's face, "but because I seemed to thrust you out into the world, unprotected, and even in danger."

Major Dale pressed his lips to his daughter's brow. Indeed she had

always been his little helper, his one dear, only daughter. Her willingness and ambition to help might have misled him, sometimes he might have forgotten she was only fourteen years old, but now, seated there beside him, fussing with his "curls," as she insisted his rather long locks were, she was little Doro again, the baby that had so often climbed on his knee, in that very room, begging for one more story when mother announced "bed time."

The mother was gone now--and Dorothy was sitting there.

"Ah, well!" sighed the major, trying to hide his thoughts, "we must talk of something pleasant."

"But the Burlock affair," ventured Dorothy. "I thought it would be splendid to think of finding them. I have not seen Mr. Burlock in some time. What do you suppose has become of him?"

Major Dale took Dorothy's hand into his own.

"Daughter," he said, "Miles Burlock has passed away."

"Dead!" gasped Dorothy.

"Yes, dead. But he was happy, glad to go, although he left his task unfinished--he had not found his wife and child."

"What happened to him?" Dorothy asked, bewildered at the suddenness of her father's words.

"He died from exhaustion as much as from any thing else. That man Anderson had sent him word to go to Buffalo for 'news.' Believing the message meant good news, that of locating the wife and child, Burlock went, but not before he had legally made me guardian of the lost daughter, and put in my charge the estate that had lately come directly into his hands through the death of Mrs. Douglass. So the poor man managed to settle his affairs before he was called away. He came back to Dalton, sick and discouraged, and determined to put that man Andrew Anderson in jail. But--well it was not to be. Ralph was with him all day and all night. We did all we could to make it easier for him, and Dorothy dear, he closed his eyes--blessing you!"

Dorothy was crying. She tried hard to be brave, but somehow the tears would come--and she had to cry!

"There, there, daughter," said the major consolingly. "I did not want to tell you just yet, but perhaps it is as well now as at any other time. I knew you would be grieved."

"Of course--I am sorry--" sighed Dorothy, "but wasn't it splendid that he had reformed!"

"Yes, and I must confess I was proud to hear a dying man bless your name. He declared that you, a mere child, had saved him from a death of

shame. I never knew Dorothy, until Ralph told me there at his bedside, that you had worked so hard to help in the crusade work, even speaking to men like Burlock, when they might not have known how to answer you."

"Oh indeed, father," she hurried to say, "I am sure Mr. Burlock was not intoxicated half the time others thought he was. He seemed so sad always and would sit on a bench, just thinking of his child perhaps, when people called him 'drunk!'" and the girl's eyes flashed indignantly at the thought.

"Well, well, daughter; you were right in showing charity. Yes, charity is the love of God and our neighbor, and it was that love that led you to take the hand of that sick and discouraged man. Ralph told me how you brought him into the Bugle office that afternoon, and how that was the beginning of a new life to Burlock for he never tasted strong drink after that day."

"It was because I was like his own daughter or he thought I was, that he listened to me," said Dorothy, not wanting to claim all the praise her father so prudently gave.

"At any rate you have the joy of knowing, daughter, that you helped a fellow creature find the right path. That joy will never leave you."

For a few moments the two sat there in silence. Dorothy had been favored with many opportunities of "distinguishing herself" as Tavia would say, but this last--the real joy of helping a man save himself--this as the major said, would never leave her.

"And all this trouble about the Ford girl?" inquired the major presently, "has that been settled?"

"Oh, yes, indeed it has," answered Dorothy, scarcely knowing what explanation to make. "Sarah is very hasty, and of course you know how Tavia loves to tease."

"But it seems this was no nonsense. Mr. Ford declared he would make Mr. Travers pay the girl's doctor bill."

"Did he really? I had not heard that. But Tavia was not to blame. Sarah has admitted it was all a misunderstanding."

"Evidently she has not told her father that," the major replied, "for only this morning he assured me he would give the doctor's bill into the hands of a collector."

"Oh, that would be too bad! Tavia's folks are so poor. I must see Sarah."

"Do you have to straighten that matter out also? Well, Little Captain, I am afraid you have a busy time of it. When one is willing to help others it is perfectly surprising how much they can find to do."

"But you see, daddy, someone has to do it,"

"Exactly. I have no objections to you mixing up in school girl affairs; in fact I think that line of work quite as important as book learning. It is the best kind of education, for it fits one for their place in life: but I think, daughter, it might be best for you to give up helping in the crusade. I would rather not have you risk--perhaps insults in that work."

"Of course, if you wish it father," answered Dorothy in a disappointed tone, "but if I could just help out in what Ralph had planned for the girls--a sort of auxiliary work--I would like it. The meetings would be held in the afternoon, and we would have little benefit affairs, to help defray the expenses of the League."

"Oh, that sort of thing," agreed the major, "that would be all right and strictly in a girl's line. Everybody should show sympathy with the movement, for it means more to Dalton than we can estimate. Children, particularly, will be benefited, so that there can be no objection to them helping in their own way."

Dorothy felt greatly relieved now that her father had spoken on this subject, for she had feared he would ask her to give up, entirely, the temperance work she had become so interested in. The most prominent women in Dalton were identified with the movement, and with such leaders surely no girl need be afraid to follow. Besides, as Major Dale said, children would be those most benefited, therefore children should do what they could to help the work along.

"I am so glad you do not object to the Auxiliary, father," she said, as he arose to bid her good night. "Of course I shall never meet another Miles Burlock, and therefore I shall not have to make a personal appeal to any one again," and she looked sadly into her father's face. "Do you think we will ever find little Nellie?"

"Yes, daughter, I feel certain we will soon hear something of the heirs of Miles Burlock. But there now," and he kissed her again, "run along to bed. Your brothers are snoring by this time."

"Good night, daddy dear," she said, pressing his cheek lovingly to her own, "I never forget that I am the daughter of a soldier, and that thought, more than anything else--earthly, takes care of me--guides me aright, and makes me proud of being Dorothy Dale!"

CHAPTER XII

AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK

The beautiful month of June was jotting down her days with sweetest

floral mottoes--each in its turn paying tribute to the Queen of Months. Roses had come, daisies were weaving the fields into a cloth of white and gold, the side roads of Dalton were framed with clouds of snowy dogwood, and that "rarest of days" the perfect day in June had come. And this was to be the picnic day for the girls of Dalton school.

Tavia was over to Dorothy's house very early. She wanted to borrow a lunch box, and, incidentally, to hear Dorothy's opinion of the "glorious dress" from Rochester.

"Isn't it sweet?" she began pirouetting on the board walk, at the side door of the Dale house, while waiting for Joe to find an empty cracker box for her lunch.

"It is pretty," agreed Dorothy, examining the dress critically. "Those pink ribbons are so becoming to you."

"Cousin Nannie had it made for a party, so it ought to do for a picnic," Tavia said. "How do you feel to-day Doro? I have been thinking you look--sort of 'peaked' as Aunt Libby would say. Have you been worrying about the explanation business? Because if you feel sensitive about it, just leave it to me. I am not the least bit bashful, you know."

"I feel well enough," Dorothy assured her, "and I haven't been worrying--about that any way," and Dorothy smiled to convince her friend that nothing serious was disturbing her peace of mind.

"Well, we assemble at nine you know; check our dinner pails. Thanks Joe, that will do nicely, and if I have any left I will leave it in the box when I return it. After a bluff at study, and an exchange of compliments, for my dress particularly (no one else will have anything like this) we will expect to hear something from you, Doro. Really, this business of making speeches in school is quite an accomplishment. Had I known that Alice was going to 'spout' the way she did that day I left for my vacation--ahem! you noticed Joe, how I said that? Well, I should have postponed the trip had I any idea there would be such stunts going on in lady-like society. But Doro, how is Sarah? Did you see her yesterday?"

"Yes, I saw her just for a moment," and Dorothy looked the other way to hide the serious thoughts that the meeting with Sarah recalled.

"And she has forgiven me for that push into the clouds? Now she is not so bad after all. I feel as if I should bring her some flowers or something; as a peace offering, you know."

"Well, I would not go over just to-day," said Dorothy, "for the doctor is to take the splints off her ankle--"

"Splints? Was it as bad as that? The poor girl, no wonder she--fibbed. I would too, if I had to stand for splints."

"Why don't you say 'stand splints,' and not use that horrid slang,"

corrected Dorothy.

"But she didn't stand them, she stood for them, with the other foot. You see, Doro, sometimes the much despised slang is--the real thing," and with a tantalizing swish of her skirts, and a most frivolous toss of her head Tavia called "Ta-ta!" and dashed across the fields with the lunch box under her arm.

"She's the kind of girl!" commented Joe, who had been busy making a bow and arrow for Roger. "If her brother Jack had a little of her spunk he would not be where he is."

"Why?" asked Dorothy, "doesn't Johnnie get along well at school?"

"At school?" echoed Joe, "he is never there to get along at all. I think it is clothes that keeps him home. I was going to ask Aunt Libby if any of mine might be spared--"

"Why, of course, you have some that are too small. I will see about them myself. It is too bad those children have no one to manage for them."

"What's the matter with their mother?"

"I don't know--that is--of course they have their mother, but she does not seem to know how to manage."

"And we have you and you do seem to know," responded the boy, trying the bow to make sure it would not shoot backwards. "Well, sis, you're a brick and Tavia, well, she is brick-dust, at any rate, but Jack--well he is Jack, and that is all there is to it. I'm going to ask father to let him carry Bugles next week. What little he could earn would do something for him."

"Mr. Travers is such a nice man," went on Dorothy, "I think Tavia is exactly like him."

"And Jack is like his mother. But we musn't back-bite," seeing the look of reproach on Dorothy's face. "I hope you have a jolly good time at the picnic."

One hour later the girls of Dalton school were crowded around Dorothy, asking all kinds of well-meant questions concerning her health. Tavia, too, came in for her share of the queries, although hers did not relate to health, but to other interesting little confidences, least of which was, by no means, the new dress.

But the fact that her own cousin Nannie gave it to her put Tavia at ease and questions that might otherwise seem impertinent were considered compliments--showing what a "stir" the dress created.

Dorothy looked a trifle pale, and the light blue muslin gown she wore brought out a mere gleam of the pink flush that usually shown in her cheeks. Her blonde curls--the delight of all her friends, fell in a mass

about her shoulders, so that even Tavia in the famous pink and white dress did not outdo Dorothy in pretty looks.

Alice wore a buff linen that suited her "golf style" admirably. She had the air of the well-trained college girl, the result, perhaps, of annual trips to the seashore, where she was allowed to indulge in boating, swimming, and other "manly sports" as she termed the exercise.

Belle Miller, otherwise known as "Tinkle," was as "dear and dainty" as ever, in a creamy white swiss, and May Egner wore lavender, although fully conscious of the disastrous effects of picnic sun on that perishable shade. It was a "last year's" gown, so May decided she might better get a few more turns out of it and this, she thought, would be one of the rare occasions, when a lavender might be worn, "with impunity."

All the girls wore appropriate costumes, and, when the classes assembled, the room presented a veritable holiday look. Study seemed the last thing to be thought of amid such gaiety.

Even Miss Ellis wore a white collar and cuffs, a relief from her usual somber black, and as she touched the bell she smiled pleasantly to her pupils, plainly bidding them a happy holiday.

"Young ladies," she began, "we will take a brief review of last Friday's work. It is so near closing time we must not waste an entire day."

Dorothy felt the time had arrived for her to speak.

How she dreaded to mar that happy school hour with such unpleasant reminders of past troubles!

But she had promised Sarah; moreover it was due the entire class that the occurrence should be disposed of honorably.

Tavia was waiting anxiously. Alice also fidgeted at her books. Finally Dorothy raised her hand. The motion was not seen at once by Miss Ellis, but it is safe to say no other person in the room missed it.

A stir of excitement caused the teacher to look up and she bowed to Dorothy.

"I am sorry, Miss Ellis," began Dorothy with hesitation, "to refer to anything unpleasant today, but I have promised Sarah Ford to make an explanation for her--she of course could not come herself."

"What is it Dorothy?" asked the teacher, although she no doubt guessed what the girl wished to say.

"I just want to state that Sarah did not intend to blame anyone for her accident--she had only cried that it was our fault when she was suffering so, and did not mean that those about her should have taken it up as they did. She wished me to apologize for her, and to say that the

whole thing was an accident, the reports as well as the injury."

"Thank you," said Miss Ellis as Dorothy sat down. "I am very glad indeed that the unpleasant happening has been disposed of."

Alice was on her feet next.

"I also want to apologize, Miss Ellis," she broke out in her "boyish tones," adding: "I should not have spoken as I did, when you asked me to be silent. I was rude to do so."

"A fault atoned for is a lesson learned," commented the teacher, as Alice took her seat.

It seemed to the girls the entire session would be given up to apologies and "love feasts," but when Tavia arose there was a decided murmur through the room.

"Fluffy!" whispered the girl in the very last seat referring to Tavia's fancy dress.

"Full bloom!" said another, meaning that the pink and white dress put the "Tiger Lily," as they called Tavia, in full bloom.

But these remarks had no effect on Tavia.

"I believe," she began bravely, "that I was the real cause of the trouble. I did swing Sarah too high, I was angry about Memorial Day, and blamed her for taking Dorothy's place. I am very sorry."

At that moment a man appeared at the door. It was Squire Sanders!

In he tramped, his cane beating a formidable march in advance of his steps, and his green-black hat kept on his head making a poor show of his manners in a girls' schoolroom.

"I just come in to settle up that little matter of the Ford girl," he drawled. "I see you've got that wild harum-scarum Travers' girl back again."

"The matter has been settled." Miss Ellis interrupted.

"Has, eh? Well, I've not been notified to that effect and I continue my services until I am officially notified to quit," he announced, bringing his cane down in a "full stop."

How odious his presence was in the room at that moment. Tavia's face crimsoned when he referred to her as a "harum-scarum" and only a warning look from Dorothy kept her from replying to his insult.

"I think, Squire Sanders," said Miss Ellis, "that Mr. and Mrs. Ford are satisfied the affair was an accident. It was a misunderstanding--blaming the pupils."

"Accident or no accident, that's no account to me. I'm on this case, and I intend to see it through."

"Mean old thing!" said one girl, somewhat above a whisper, "he just wants the fine. Let's chase him!"

It was quite evident more than one girl felt like "chasing" the obnoxious squire, but he held his ground and continued to punctuate his impolite remarks with that noisy cane.

"I want to see Octavia Travers at my office," he announced, "and I want her to come right along with me now!"

"Squire Sanders!" cried Miss Ellis, shocked and alarmed. "I cannot and will not permit you to take a pupil from this room!"

"Oh, you won't eh?" the squire looked more unpleasantly than ever. "Well, I'd like to see you stop me! Perhaps you would like to give up your job here? There's more after it, and some knows more about the ways of keeping wild girls down than Rachel Ellis does, too. I would advise you not to interfere with an officer. Come along, Miss Travers."

"She will not!" called out Alice. "My father is a town committeeman and I know something about the laws of Dalton. Show us your warrant!"

This was a surprise to Squire Sanders. He never expected his authority would be questioned--and by a mere schoolgirl.

"Warrant, eh?" he sneered. "Maybe you would like to come along yourself, since you are so smart!"

A wild thought flashed through the mind of Alice. What if he should take both her and Tavia to his office!

It would be a case of false arrest, and cost the squire his place in Dalton!

"Get ready!" he called again to Tavia, who now seemed to regard the whole thing as a joke, and was smiling broadly.

"Don't move a step!" called Alice, while Miss Ellis looked on helplessly.

"Now, that settles it," cried out the squire, red with anger. "I'll take you, too. Come right along here!"

Alice shot a meaning look at Miss Ellis and stepped out.

"Come, Tavia," she said, "the more the merrier. Girls we will be back in time for the picnic," and, taking the "cue" from Alice, Tavia also stepped out, and with her, marched off behind the squire.

CHAPTER XIII

A QUEER PICNIC

And that was to be picnic day!

A queer holiday, indeed, with two girls taken from the classroom--arrested!

Yes, that was what it amounted to, in spite of the jolly way Tavia and Alice trooped off, making "faces" and doing fancy "steps" back of the squire.

Miss Ellis sat at her desk dazed, and stunned. She could not realize it all--a squire coming into her room--threatening her with dismissal, and taking two girls off to the common police court for a "hearing."

She was not a woman given to showing her feelings, but this seemed more than she could bear; tears came into her eyes, fell upon her books and then she bowed her head--she had to cry! Dorothy was at her side instantly.

"Dear Miss Ellis," she murmured, "don't take it so seriously. It will be all right. I'm sure those two girls are well able to take care of themselves, and I suspect Alice went more for mischief than for anything. Perhaps I had better run down to father's office, and tell him about it; he will know exactly what to do."

The girls all looked on with sad faces. They had never before seen Miss Ellis cry in school. But she raised her head now, and seemed better able to control her feelings.

"I think, Dorothy," she said, "it may be better to wait awhile. Something may happen to--save the girls from really going to his office. We will try to study, and perhaps we may have our picnic yet."

But it was a difficult matter to apply minds to books that morning; too much had happened to be turned readily aside for mere school work. Such whispering had never been permitted before, although the girls did try to be kind to Miss Ellis, she looked so sad and worried.

Meanwhile the two girls, Tavia and Alice, had been having their own experiences.

Upon reaching the street they stepped up along side the squire, so that persons in passing thought they were merely walking along to keep the aged man company.

But Ralph Willoby was not so easily misled.

He was just leaving the Bugle office as they came along, and he instantly detected a "story."

"Come on," said Alice, "you can be our counsel. We are under arrest."

"No need," objected the squire, "I am well able to attend to this case."

"But your office is public," answered Ralph, "and I guess I'll go along and see what happens."

"But I say I don't want any interference," and the squire raised his voice. "You newspaper scamps always get things wrong anyway."

"Probably because you do not give us a chance to get them right," retorted Ralph. "This time we will try to stick to facts."

"Well, when I'm ready to give them out you can have them, but not before," insisted the angry squire.

"But I'm going along, just the same," declared Ralph, as Tavia stepped back to walk with him, so that the squire was obliged to go on with Alice, who really seemed to be enjoying the experience.

The office of the justice of the peace was a dingy, dirty little place. It had served Dalton for the small needs of a public office for some years, Squire Sanders, of course, collecting a good income for its yearly rental.

An old bench was stretched in front of the desk.

The girls sank down on this, making queer "faces" and comical gestures.

"My first offense!" sighed Alice, with mock sadness.

"Same here!" said Tavia in similar tone.

"Since you wish it," said Ralph to Alice, "I can act as counsel. You know I really am studying law, and there is nothing like taking cases for experience."

"Now, no skylarking here," called out the squire, "I want to hear all about that case, let me see--the case of--I've got it somewhere," and he turned the soiled pages of the "records" over rather roughly, considering they were supposed to belong to the town of Dalton.

Tavia was biting her lips. She felt every moment the laugh would get the better of her and get out on its own accord, but she tried bravely to suppress it.

Ralph was whispering to Alice. Evidently he was pleased with the information she imparted, for he, too, smiled broadly as the squire called:

"Octavia Travers, step up to the bar!"

"What for?" asked Tavia saucily.

"To swear--take your oath--make your affidavit," called the squire sharply.

"What's the charge?" interrupted Ralph.

"Sault an' batt'ry," snapped the squire.

"Who signed the warrant?" questioned Ralph further.

"See here young feller!" and the squire rapped his cane vigorously upon the desk, "if you don't let me go on with this case I'll kick you out."

"Oh, no, you won't. I have as much right here as you have, and I intend to see that you do not, in any way, insult the young ladies!"

"You young scamp!" yelled the squire, making a dash for Ralph and bringing his cane down squarely on the young man's head, at which Alice and Tavia screamed.

A moment later the men were scuffling on the floor.

"I'll teach you!" the squire kept yelling.

"Let me go!" shouted Ralph.

"Oh, we must get help!" screamed Alice. "Tavia, run quick, to the office next door. That man is crazy. He will kill Ralph," and, while Tavia ran to one side of the place, Alice hurried to the other, so that all possible help would be called at once.

In a short time the little place was crowded. Some came to aid, and others came to see what was wrong. Alice and Tavia stood by with very white faces. Alice had pulled the squire away from Ralph and the aged man finally had been subdued, that is two men had succeeded in keeping him away from Ralph, but not until the young man had been considerably injured. The squire was still sputtering and those who tried to quiet him had a hard task of it. Every time they would let go his arms he would throw them up with new energy, trying to get at Ralph again, until at last it was found necessary to go to the constables' desk; get out the only pair of handcuffs in Dalton, and put them on the wrists of the obstreperous official.

This, of course, was great fun for the boys who had gathered about, and who had more than one grudge against Squire Sanders. Many a time he had chased them off the coasting hill, he had often spoiled a good day's swimming, and as for apples--a boy never knew when he was safe to "borrow" one from any orchard in Dalton.

But the tables were turned now--and the boys were glad of it. A taste of his own medicine would do the aged man good, they declared.

Not being able to do more than shout and kick, Squire Sanders soon "gave out" and fell back sullenly in a chair near a window. Ralph's head was bleeding.

"Oh, we must get Ralph to the drug store," insisted Alice. "Perhaps Dr. Gray will be there. He is hurt, I am sure," and she was almost in tears, for indeed Ralph looked very much injured--his lip was cut, and girls cannot well stand the sight of blood.

Ralph felt quite well able to walk, he declared, and assured the girls, laughingly, that their case and his would now likely "come up" together in the next term of court.

But just as Alice, Tavia, Ralph, and a few sympathizing friends were ready to leave the office Franklin MacAllister, president of the Selectmen of Dalton, and father of Alice, stepped into the place. He had heard of the disturbance, and having power to act in any such emergency, he hurried to the scene.

"Well," he exclaimed, seeing his daughter there, "what in the world are you doing here?"

"Oh, I made all the trouble," replied Alice, "that is, Tavia and I made it. We were arrested--"

"Arrested!" repeated the father, incredulously.

"Yes, indeed we were. And Mr. Willoby only stepped in to help us when he got in trouble."

Mr. MacAllister talked earnestly to Ralph. Plainly both men were of the same opinion--either Squire Sanders was crazy or he was too old and incompetent to hold office.

"What are we going to do with him, Mr. President?" asked one of the men who had the unpleasant duty of standing by and keeping guard over the squire.

"Bind him over to keep the peace," replied the president. "Squire Sanders," he called, and thereat every one held his or her breath, "this is a sad predicament to find an officer in. In fact the occurrence is a disgrace to the town of Dalton."

The squire shifted uneasily in the chair. He had not spoken coherently since the struggle with Ralph, and was still in an ugly mood. At the same time he understood who now addressed him; the president of the board; the man who had authority to bring matters about so as to deprive him of the office he had held for years.

"Stand up!" called the president, and the squire shuffled awkwardly to

his feet.

"What have you to say in this matter? We have a quorum of the board here present and we may as well dispose of this case. There is also another count pending against you. How did you come to let that man Anderson slip out of Dalton so easily--help him out in fact? Was his money better than that of the people of this town, who for years have been paying you for duties that you have never honestly performed?"

At the mention of Anderson, Squire Sanders' face turned from red to a deadly ashen.

"Look out," cautioned Ralph aside to the president, "he is old you know, and might drop at any moment."

"Not a bit of it," went on Mr. MacAllister. "He is too tough for that. Speak up, Sanders. This is your last chance."

But the man never moved his lips. Sullen and beaten he sat there while Mr. MacAllister, recounted some of his misdeeds.

"You have disgraced your office," he declared, "but the most outrageous of your offenses was that of bringing into this office two innocent schoolgirls--doctoring up a charge against them, trying to force them to acknowledge they had taken part in an affair that they had absolutely nothing to do with--and all this you did for the paltry fee that goes with each case on your books. Now, Sanders, I have spoken to the members of the board here present and the verdict in your case is--that you leave Dalton inside of ten days. The penalty for contempt in the matter will be a public trial, and, no doubt, imprisonment."

It was a difficult matter to restrain the boys present. They wanted to cheer--to shout, but were not allowed to do so. Ralph had quite recovered himself now, and so insisted on going alone to the drugstore to have his slight wounds dressed if necessary. Two of the selectmen looked after Sanders, releasing him of the handcuffs, and advising him "to make himself scarce" around Dalton, until the feeling against him had quieted down some. All the defiance had left him now; he scarcely raised his head as he crept out the back way to his rooms next door.

Upon hearing the school story in full Mr. MacAllister decided to take his daughter and Tavia back to the school room himself, and set every thing right with Miss Ellis and her pupils.

"You have had a rough time of it lately," he commented as he and the two girls made their way to the school.

"But Alice is a--a brick!" declared Tavia, in appreciation of her friend's assistance. "She helped us splendidly."

"Glad to hear it," answered the father, "Alice is our tom-boy, but she is true-blue, eh, Bob?" he said patting his daughter affectionately.

"You knew what I meant about the man Anderson, did you not, Tavia?" he

went on. "That was your 'special friend' I believe."

"Oh, I have met him," replied Tavia laughing, "but I think now the reason the old squire wanted to get me into this trouble was because he thought it might affect Dorothy Dale, as she is my special friend. Somehow the Burlock-Anderson affair seemed to be aimed at the Dales."

"Oh, yes, no doubt of it," answered Mr. MacAllister, "but we think we are on the track of settling the matter now."

Tavia felt she could scarcely wait to tell all this to Dorothy, for she had been wondering what had become of the Anderson affair. Alice looked proudly up at her father as they neared the school.

"They may think you have come to take someone else away," she said laughing. "This has been a queer picnic day."

"Don't worry about that," he answered. "You must have an extra good time to make up for your troubles and disappointment, I will see what I can do for you."

Alice cast a meaning glance at Tavia. If her father undertook to give Dalton school a treat it would surely be something worth while, Alice was sure, and so, with that bright prospect uppermost in her mind, she led her father into the school room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECRET

It took but a short time for Mr. MacAllister to explain everything satisfactorily to Miss Ellis and her pupils. He was a gentleman any daughter might well be proud of, and, indeed, Alice showed a pardonable pride as he stood there smiling and assuring the teacher that, as president of the Selectmen of Dalton, he would promise a holiday to the class that would make up in every way for the disappointment of the morning.

When the visitor had departed, Miss Ellis announced she would carry out the intended program as far as a half session was concerned, but, as it was too late to go on the picnic then the pupils might go home and enjoy themselves as they wished.

Tavia and Alice were now regarded as heroines. To think they had really been in the court, and that they had been witnesses to--"a fight," as Tavia declared Squire Sanders' attack on Ralph was "nothing more nor less than a common roll around fight."

Finally the picnic lunches were disposed of, and Tavia took Dorothy's

arm as they walked homeward--she had much to tell Dorothy and knew that no girl would interrupt such apparent confidence as "arm in arm" indicated.

"And what do you think Mr. MacAllister said?" began Tavia. "That old Squire Sanders let that horrible man get out of Dalton--the man who frightened us so!"

"Did he?" replied Dorothy, absently.

"And you knew, of course, about poor Miles Burlock--he died when you were sick, so I did not tell you anything about it."

"Yes, father told me."

"What are you thinking of, Doro? You are not listening to me at all."

"I have so much to think of," answered Dorothy, smiling. "I can hardly keep my thoughts in line."

"But you should have seen Alice--Oh, she just pulled the old squire by the collar. She didn't wait for a man to come. And look at my dress! Isn't it a sight? I might have known there would be an earthquake or a fight when I attempted to wear anything like this."

"It is too bad, but that is a straight tear. You can easily mend it."

"But Ralph's eye; that will not darn so neatly. I hope that hateful old squire never shows his ugly 'phiz-mahogony' in Dalton again."

"Do you think Ralph is much hurt?" Dorothy inquired anxiously. "Wasn't it disgraceful?"

"Perfectly rambunctious!" declared Tavia, "although it might have been jolly good fun if Ralph had another fellow in his place--one not quite so careful of the squire's feelings and features. But you should have seen the squire with the handcuffs on! Oh! it was better than the play I saw in Rochester," and Tavia relieved her pent-up jollity by tossing into the air the borrowed lunch box and making "passes" at it, with queer pranks in imitation of the jugglers she had seen at Rochester.

"Tavia," asked Dorothy, very seriously, "do you think you could keep a secret?"

"Keep a secret? Dorothy darling, Dare-me!"

"Now, no joking, Tavia," insisted Dorothy, "this is a matter of importance."

"Oh, I just love importance. That was what mostly happened to me and Alice to-day in the squire's office--importance!"

"Well, if you really can't be serious--"

"Oh, but, Doro dear, just try me. I shall weep if you say so, only-- pardon, mamselle, but do not, if you please, make that weep too long, a few sniffs only, for I have not with me in this fleshling costume ze 'kerchief," and she made a most ridiculous little French "squat," further evidence of the Rochester play.

"I am afraid Tavia, that trip to your Aunt Mary's has affected your head; they say nothing can do so more effectively than certain kinds of plays."

"Well, the one I saw was the certain kind. Why, last night mother nearly had nervous prostration because I was practicing up in my room. I was trying to do a fall--and I did it all right."

"How foolish you are, Tavia," said Dorothy slightly frowning, "I would not think of such nonsense if I were you."

"Yes, it was awfully foolish, for it knocked the ceiling down in the kitchen, just dusting Johnnie's pompadour. The escape, however, made mother happy, so that the ceiling did not count."

Dorothy "gave in." She had to laugh and did laugh so heartily she was obliged to sit down on the grass to enjoy the "tragedy" as Tavia described the stage fall and the "ceiling drop."

"But the secret?" demanded Tavia, making sure her skirt would not be stained, before taking her place on the grass beside Dorothy.

"Yes, I do want to tell you," answered Dorothy, "Now listen. You know Squire Sanders was particularly anxious that you should stand all the blame for Sarah's accident."

"Particularly anxious? He was dead set on it. Polite language doesn't fit the case."

"Tavia, you really are too slangy. It may be all right just for fun, in talking to girls, but some day you will be sorry. It will become a habit."

"Like Jake Schmid taking the pledge. I saw him yesterday very close to-- a saloon!"

"Poor Jake!" said Dorothy with a sigh. "But he does seem to try--"

"To take the pledge? Indeed he does and I admire his perseverance. That's just the way I try to avoid slang."

"I am afraid, Tavia, we will not accomplish much in the way of confidences, if you persist in being--ridiculous," and Dorothy made as if to continue on her way home.

"Sit right down there, Dorothy Dale," insisted Tavia, pulling her

friend's skirt, and bringing Dorothy down beside her rather suddenly. "I will have to play the villain and demand that 'secret!'"

"Well, it is simply this: I think I see the motive Squire Sanders had in trying to disgrace you."

"Let me see it quick!" snapped Tavia.

"Didn't your father run against him last year for the office of Town Squire?"

"Certainly," said Tavia, briefly.

"And the only reason he did not get the office was because the squire was so old the men thought it best not to disturb him just then."

"Right, again," answered Tavia.

"Election time is now almost here. Your father would be up for the office again. Don't you see by bringing trouble to you and your folks your father would become unpopular?"

"And get left!"

"Yes; be defeated."

"But he will not!" and Tavia's brown eyes danced significantly. "The squire is down and out. And worse yet he has to run for his money. Now my own dear dad will have a chance. Oh, Doro, I love politics better than eating. I hope some day soon, while Tavia Travers is still in circulation, the women will vote in Dalton same as they do in Rochester--they don't just exactly vote in Rochester, but a lot of them talk about it."

"Now you must not mention my suspicions," cautioned Dorothy, "for I must speak to father first. It does not seem fair that the Fords should be blamed for making statements about you that, perhaps, the squire put into their heads."

"Dorothy Dale, you would make a first class lawyer, and when you want a job at it I will engage you to defend my case. But I do not see how I am to keep all that momsey. It would be so good to have father back at a desk again. They say he really was a first class justice out in Millville. And he just hates his work now--so little wages; mom cannot seem to make them go around--me and Johnnie; Johnnie mostly gets the knot at the end."

"It certainly would be splendid to have him get the position. And I am sure father will do all he can for him: but I would not mention it to your mother, just yet."

"All right Doro, I have given you my promise, but you have made me so happy!" and Tavia hugged Dorothy so enthusiastically that the latter was

obliged to beg off.

"And I tell you what," went on Tavia, "when Pop gets Squire Sander's place I--this--me--you know" and she made another wonderful, sweeping all-around bow, "I will be 'city clerk.' I will keep the books and Dorothy Hill-and-Dale, if ever your name gets on the books it shall be promptly eliminated, elucidated, expurgated--there now! Don't you think I should be in the grad. class? I was looking up words with 'ate' in--my favorite pastime,--and I came across that bunch."

"I do really think, Tavia, that you would do better at school if you only tried. We cannot always have studies that we are especially interested in. It is like the scales in piano practice, they give us the mechanical work for pretty dances and other brilliant pieces."

"Well, we have no piano, so I do not have to worry about that. I suppose you will play at the closing exercises?"

"Miss Ellis has asked me to. But Tavia, we really must be going. I have promised to go over to Sarah's this afternoon."

"May I go with you? I just would like to feel that we had talked it all off, you know. I do not want to think Sarah has any hard feelings."

"Certainly; come, I am sure Sarah will be glad to see you, and her mother is very pleasant. Be careful not to tell too much about to-day's affairs, it might worry Sarah."

"If I forget myself you just squint, and I'll be as mum as a mummy."

So Dorothy and Tavia started off homeward, arm in arm.

CHAPTER XV

DOROTHY IN POLITICS

The news of Squire Sanders' downfall spread rapidly throughout Dalton. To the men interested in public affairs it was no surprise, for they had known, of course, of his shortcomings; but there were those in the town who looked upon the "disgraceful scene" in the office that morning as something too serious for ordinary treatment--it should be brought to the attention of the sheriff, they declared.

Among those of that opinion was Mr. Ford, father of Sarah. He was one of the men who felt they had been wronged, personally, by the squire, and in reference to this matter Mr. Ford called upon Major Dale.

It was late that same afternoon, when Dorothy and Tavia were visiting Sarah, that Mr. Ford arrived at the office of Major Dale.

"I have been a fool," he told the major, "to listen to such arguments as that man made against mere children. Of course my daughter was injured and that angered me; but it was the foolish talk of that old man which made me think I should have revenge--revenge upon a girl no more guilty than a babe in its cradle."

Mr. Ford spoke with much bitterness. Men do not like to make such mistakes, but those of high character are always ready to do what they can to right such wrongs.

"But there was no real harm done?" interrupted the major.

"No harm done! To take two innocent girls into that office and accuse them of--I don't know what! Why, Major, it was simply outrageous," and Mr. Ford paced the floor impatiently.

"It was a lucky thing that my young man, Ralph Willoby, happened along, although it seemed unlucky enough for him. But I believe he is not injured beyond a cut lip and bruised eye. The old squire seemed to have entirely lost control of himself. This comes from keeping incompetent men in office--just through sentiment."

"Exactly. They can do more harm than one would imagine. Think how he talked me into the idea that this poor Travers family should pay my daughter's doctor bill! And I told him to go ahead and collect it!"

Each time that this thought came to Mr. Ford it seemed to him more repugnant. First, that he should have blamed Tavia without investigating the matter himself; next that he should have allowed a man like Squire Sanders to "humbug" him.

"Well," said the major, "we now have it in our power to put the right man in the office of Justice of the Peace. You know John Travers was up for it last year."

"I do, but--he is not of our party."

"Yet you admit he is the right man?"

"I know of no one better fitted for the office."

"Then make it the man this time, and leave the party aside. Franklin MacAllister was in this afternoon. He says the appointment must be made at once, but that your faction in the council will oppose Travers. Your vote can decide the matter."

Mr. Ford was silent for a moment. Men think it almost a sacred obligation to "stick to their party," especially when that party puts the member in office with the understanding that their interests shall be looked after.

"It may cost me my place on the board--" said Mr. Ford thoughtfully,

"but that will not affect my family, or my pocket-book--"

"Still you have been a good member," interrupted the major, "and we cannot afford to lose you, either."

"But you said Mac. stated my vote would carry it one way or other?"

"Yes, he has canvassed it."

"Then Travers shall be the man!" and Mr. Ford brought one hand down on the other in a most determined, and defiant manner.

"Strange," said Major Dale, "but the children have settled this for us. My little girl Dorothy had the whole thing planned out, and talked me over to her way. She is very fond of the Travers girl, you know."

The office door opened and Mr. MacAllister entered.

"Hullo!" he said cheerily. "Been lobbying, Major?"

"Seems so."

"Well, Travers has my vote," Mr. Ford hurried to say.

"What, going back on your party?" said Mr. MacAllister, laughing.

"Either that or go back on my own daughter," commented Mr. Ford. "It seems this is the girls' election."

The major could hardly disguise his pride--Dorothy had certainly "been busy" lately, and every undertaking of hers had met with success. A girl, after all, may be something more than a pretty doll, he thought. But the whole thing is to get them to exert their influence in the right direction. See how Dorothy had helped in the liquor crusade. And without "soiling her finger tips," thought the major, proudly.

And while this caucus was being held in the major's office, Dorothy was conducting another sort of meeting at the Ford home.

Tavia and Sarah had "made up" most affectionately. Sickness, sometimes is a powerful teacher, and afforded, in Sarah's case, time to think reasonably which was plainly what she needed.

"I always thought the girls disliked me," she told Tavia, "that, of course, made me dislike most of them. But I did love Dorothy," she hastened to declare, "and I was jealous of her love for you."

"I don't blame you a bit," answered Tavia, in her direct way. "If she should turn 'round and fall in love with you--why then no telling what might happen."

Sarah was now able to walk around with the aid of a cane, and this afternoon she sat out on the porch entertaining her friends.

"I do hope," said Dorothy, "that you will be able to go on the picnic with us, Sarah. Perhaps that, too, will be all the better for being postponed."

"Only my lunch," sighed Tavia, melodramatically. "I shall never be able to put up another such!" and she smacked her lips in remembrance of the good things the borrowed lunch box had contained.

"Perhaps, then, I will be able to invite you to take some of mine," said Sarah politely. "Mother just loves to do up dainty lunches."

"Accepted with pleasure," replied Tavia, imitating society manners. "Make it enough for yourself, plenty for me, and a little to spare. Then we will be sure to come out all right."

Mrs. Ford came out to ask the visitors to remain to tea, but they politely declined. She was especially kind in talking to Tavia, and invited her to come again with Dorothy.

"They say," remarked Dorothy to Tavia, as the girls hurried along the lane, "'that love scarce is love that does not know the sweetness of forgiving,' and it does seem that way, don't you think so?"

"Oh, that was what ailed us all, was it? Not our fault at all, but the fault of some old mildewed poet, that wanted to make good his verses. The 'sweetness of forgiving,' eh? Well, it is better than scrapping, I'll admit, but I wish poets would make up something handier. We went through quite something to find the sweetness."

"Hurry," whispered Dorothy, "I thought I heard something move in the bushes!"

"So did I," admitted Tavia, quickening her pace.

"It is always so lonely in the lane at night, we should have gone around."

"Let's run," suggested Tavia. "One row a day is enough for me."

The bushes stirred suspiciously now, and both girls were alarmed. They were midway in the lane, and could not gain the road, except by running on to the end of the lonely path. Each side was lined with a thick underbrush, and--there was no mistaking it now--someone was stealing along beside them!

Taking hold of hands the girls ran. As they did the figure of a man darted out in the path after them. Not a word was spoken--all their strength was put into speed--to get to the end of the lane before that man should overtake them!

They knew the footing well, although the path was rough with tree stumps and rocks thrown there from the fields at the side.

Suddenly there was an exclamation. Turning quickly Tavia saw the man's form rolling in the deep grass.

"He has fallen over the big stump," she said, "and has rolled into the thick briars. Hurry now, we will get out all right." And, with renewed courage, the girls ran on, reaching the end of the lane in full view of houses, before the "tramp" could possibly overtake them.

"That was the same fellow," declared Tavia. "What in the world does he follow us for?"

"It's all the Burlock business," Dorothy answered. "But hurry, we must give the alarm this time. Perhaps they will be able to catch him."

Out of breath, and very much frightened, the girls reached the center of the village, going directly there instead of turning into a side street to go home.

"Perhaps father is in his office," remarked Dorothy.

"There's Ralph," said Tavia, as that young man emerged from a doorway.

Quicker than it takes to tell it a searching party was formed. The three men who had been talking politics were still in the major's office, and when told of the girl's fright they promptly started out for the lane picking up more help at every turn.

"We will get him if we have to burn down the woods," declared the major, deeply incensed at his daughter's peril.

"And not a gun in the crowd," remarked Mr. MacAllister. "This is where we need our constable."

They had reached the lane now, and it was quite dark. Numbers of men, who had been taking a quiet evening smoke at their own doors joined in the "rounding up" as Mr. Ford called it.

"No Squire Sanders to help him out this time," some one remarked.

Then the men scattered--completely surrounding the place where the tramp had been last seen.

"The only way he could get away from us would be in a balloon," said Mr. MacAllister.

"Or an airship," spoke up someone else.

With heavy clubs and every available weapon to beat down the brush they started out through the lane on the man hunt.

Surely twenty good men should be able to find the one "tramp" now.

But would they?

CHAPTER XVI

THE GIRLS HAVE IT

It was an entirely new experience for Dalton men--searching for a miscreant that spring evening in the lane. But evening wore into nightfall and no trace of the "tramp" had been discovered.

From either end of the lane the men came together at last, and admitted they had been again outwitted by the "slick rascal."

Mr. MacAllister, in dismissing the party, urged them to be at the town meeting that night to vote for a constable, and never had the need of such an official been so plainly demonstrated.

"We must go about to-night," he said, "and notify business persons to be on the lookout for a fellow of this description. Of course, if we had a regular constable we might save ourselves that trouble."

To the old politicians of Dalton, those who always voted promptly, but put off paying taxes until the very last notice had been served upon them, the appointment of John Travers to succeed Squire Sanders, came as a surprise. Poor men are not always popular, and the other candidate, Baldwin Blake, was the sort of fellow it was pleasant to meet--around election times. But John Travers got the office without a dissenting vote in the council--a matter quite as surprising to Mr. Travers as to any man present. Mr. MacAllister whispered aside to Major Dale, when the result of the ballot was made known:

"Travers does not know what a strong pull our young politicians have. This is the girls' campaign."

But when a few hours later, the new squire told his own girl of the good fortune, Tavia declared Dorothy had managed it all.

It was a fact, however regrettable, that Mrs. Travers was not at home to hear the good news. She had gone to see a sick friend that afternoon, and had sent word later that she would remain away all night.

But Mrs. Travers was probably not as blamable in her home-making delinquencies as it might appear. She simply did not know how to make a home. She belonged to that unfortunately large class of women, who have received a so-called "education" from books, but who have never been trained in either discipline or character, which might give the forbearance necessary in meeting the actual trials of life, or in the management of the great American dollar, which might make up, in a measure, for lack of discipline, when that dollar, like the proverbial

charity, must cover a multitude of wants. Mrs. Travers had attended a school where embroidery was the chief number in the curriculum, and mathematics (after decimal fractions) made elective. Hence it was that the burden of responsibility came so early to Tavia, who was scarcely better able to undertake it than the mother.

The unfortunate result of this total lack of management might have discouraged a man less optimistic than John Travers, but he always "made allowances," just as he did to-night when the indifferent wife was not there to share in the family's happy hour.

"Maybe I can help you with the books," suggested Tavia, when the possible details of the new position were being discussed.

"Oh, I will have plenty of time to attend to them, daughter," her father replied. "The books I want you to attend to are those at school--I want you to make up for lost time. Dalton people will expect more from us now that they are giving us a chance."

"Dorothy says I do better than I imagine," replied Tavia. "I did not expect to pass--I had been home so much--but if only I could get a 'conditional,' and leave when Dorothy does!"

Ambition had come to Tavia--at last.

Her father wished her to get through school, and she determined, if such a thing was possible she would do it.

"I could study very hard," she told herself, when thinking the matter over very seriously, that night, in her own little cheerless room. "Dorothy has all her work done, and I am sure she will help me."

And what a surprise it would be to every one if she really did get "conditioned" in the studies she failed in, and should actually graduate in the general work.

What a wonderful thing it was to have something definite to work for! Dorothy and Alice had always felt that way, but until to-night Tavia had never known the real joy of doing good work, with the actual reward in sight. Home life had been dreary indeed, school had been little better, the only bright spot in the misplaced life had been put in by Dorothy Dale. And what a power for good had been the quiet, unobtrusive influence!

"I owe every single thing to Dorothy," Tavia declared to her own heart that eventful night, "and I hope some day I will be able to show her I am not ungrateful."

A GIRL'S WEAPON

Tavia's plans took shape next morning--there was nothing visionary about them. She did surprise her father with a neat breakfast table, and Johnnie surprised himself with a clean linen suit.

"Nothing succeeds like success," said the father, pleased and happy that, at last something had "happened" to brighten the make-shift home.

"And when mother comes," Tavia announced, "she will find that I have discovered how to keep house, for I have already provided for dinner. Now Johnnie, be careful that you do me credit--go right straight to school when it's time, and don't, as you value your place in--in--my heart, miss a single lesson!"

"Good!" said the father, actually taking a tiny rosebud from the clean milk bottle, in the center of the table, and putting it in his buttonhole.

"Would it be silly for a boy to wear a flower?" faltered Johnnie, "Joe Dale often does."

"Indeed every boy in school will know to-day that pop is the 'head constable' so why shouldn't you decorate?" and the sister put in the fresh linen waist a bud that exactly matched the one chosen by the squire.

Mr. Travers recalled that this was the first morning he could remember when his two children sat at table with him. They were always busy or sleeping--any place but where they should be at breakfast time.

"Now, I must see Dorothy before school," said Tavia, leaving the table. "Johnnie, just eat all your toast while I clear up. Then you can bring in fresh water, and some wood to have ready for noon, in case mother should not get home in time to do everything."

Mr. Travers was also in a hurry to get down to the Green, he had made an appointment to talk with Major Dale and he did not delay after breakfast. A new world had been discovered by him--the land of prosperity; ambition for his children, and perhaps even contentment for the incompetent little woman who had suffered too, and who now might find a way and heart to do what seemed not worth while before.

But Dorothy had "anticipated" Tavia's visit and was at the door before the latter had entirely cleared away the table.

"Why!" exclaimed Dorothy, when her eyes rested on the flowers, "you are celebrating!"

"Good reason why!" responded Tavia proudly, "my dad's a squire!"

"I am so glad," murmured Dorothy, giving Tavia a kiss. "Now you will be

somebody, won't you?"

"I am already--somebody else. You won't know me; better ask for an introduction," and she walked haughtily to the sink with the last of the dishes.

"Delighted, I'm sure!" simpered Dorothy, imitating the society voice.

"Pray be seated," went on the new Tavia, "I'll be disengaged directly."

Tavia's happiness was so entirely self-evident there was no need for her to make formal expression of it to Dorothy, yet, as she had promised herself to be "just like other girls" Tavia felt the obligation to say something polite.

"I know, Dorothy," she began, "we owe everything to you. But it has really made a new world for us, and now, you will see how we appreciate it. I am going to get through school, if I can, and perhaps, when we get better off, I may go on with you at school and grow up--like you."

"Tavia dear," said Dorothy earnestly, "I am sure you will always be my friend, whether you have a fancy education or not. We have learned more than can be taught from books--we have learned to help each other, and to understand each other."

"Yes, I cannot imagine anything ever coming into our lives that would keep us apart--even distance does not separate minds and hearts."

Tavia had finished her work now, and surprised Dorothy by neatly washing out the dish towels.

Dorothy was ready to go now for it was getting close to the hour for school.

"I must tell you something in confidence," said she, "father thinks he has a clew to the little Burlock girl's whereabouts."

"Yes, and I thought the same thing when what do you suppose?--Aunt Mary writes me that the woman--Mrs. Burlock--is dead!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Dorothy.

"Yes, and the society cannot now find her girl--she did have a daughter."

"But surely, in a place like Rochester, they should be able to trace a little girl," Dorothy insisted.

"They should be, but they were not. Aunt Mary wrote that the charitable society had buried the woman, and when a young lady from the organization went back to the rooms with the little girl she allowed her to escape. That is, the young lady went out to buy something and when she came back the girl was gone."

"Did she run away?"

"Haven't the least idea. But say, Doro, we will be late, sure pop, and me putting on airs this morning. Quarter of nine. Now let's see if we can beat last night's record. I'll set the pace," and so saying the girls started off on a run, for it was most desirable that they reach the school a few minutes, at least, before the bell rang.

Dorothy insisted Tavia should go straight to Miss Ellis and tell her how she was so anxious to keep up with her class.

"You might change your mind," Dorothy remarked laughing, "and Tavia, there is nothing like outside help for keeping troublesome resolutions."

"Guess you're right," said Tavia with a sigh. "I may as well clinch it."

"No slang now," interrupted Dorothy. "Graduates never use slang."

"Then I've changed my mind already," pouted Tavia, "I must have slang or die--'Liberty of speech or death!'" she exclaimed with a dramatic gesture.

"Come on," pleaded Dorothy, who was really anxious that Tavia should speak to Miss Ellis before the classes assembled.

To her surprise Tavia learned from her teacher that she had not so very much to make up, and could, no doubt, do it if she tried.

"You have been doing very well lately," said Miss Ellis, "and during the days you were away we had scarcely any new lessons--nothing but review. You were always fair in mathematics when you put your mind to your work. Now let us see if you cannot surprise everyone by getting all through--not conditioned in anything."

Such encouragement was all Tavia needed. She went to work with a will that day, and every time Dorothy glanced over at her (for Dorothy was as anxious for her success as if it were entirely her own affair) she would see Tavia "poring" over her book as if her very life depended upon her accomplishing just so much work and she was bound she would do it.

How quickly the morning passed! It was so different to be busy in school, Tavia thought, so much better than having the hours drag along. At recess Alice hugged her in congratulation.

"I knew he would get it," she said, referring, of course, to the new position of Mr. Travers, "and father says we girls elected him. I see you are already doing credit to the confidence with which Dalton people have intrusted your family."

"I am sure father will give satisfaction," Tavia answered, ignoring the intended compliment for herself. "He had a splendid record in Millville."

"And the picnic," said Alice. "Have you heard it is really coming off this time? Next Monday."

"Then Sarah will be able to come," remarked Tavia, "I am just glad we waited for her."

All the girls agreed it would be especially nice to have a genuine reunion, as this would be the last holiday until vacation, and that, of course, would mean a scattering of classmates.

"It will be a star picnic," declared Alice, as the girls returned to the school room.

"If nothing else happens," said Dorothy with apprehension for which she could not account.

"Why did you say that?" asked Tavia.

"I don't know. But somehow I feel as if something will happen," and Dorothy had sufficient reason afterward to remember the premonition.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOROTHY IN DANGER

Picnic day came at last, and with it there drew up to the gate of Dalton School two four-horse wagons, the regular "straw-ride" variety.

Mr. Ford had provided the conveyances, and when all the girls had been seated on the big side benches with parasols, lunch boxes and "happy smiling faces," the ride itself constituted a thoroughly enjoyable outing.

Sarah was there, between Dorothy and Tavia, and upon her arrival at the school (the wagon had stopped for her as it came up) she received a hearty welcome--an ovation, Tavia called it.

Her face was pale, and her manner nervous, but she whispered aside to Dorothy that she was so happy, and that she could never have been happy with the girls after the trouble if Dorothy had not "straightened every thing out for her."

Miss Ellis, too, seemed very much pleased at the prospect of a happy day--"after all," she thought, "her girls were well worth working for." It was a beautiful day in June and the ride to the woods was perfumed with that rare and wonderful incense--vapory sweetness of flowers warmed by the soft sunshine of early summer.

Blossoms brushed the faces of our friends as the picnic wagons rumbled on and many a wreath of "laurel" was pressed to the brow of fair graduates as the maple leaves in the hands of willing weavers, were made into crowns for the "grads."

A secret was plainly lurking in the eyes of Alice MacAllister. Dorothy had remarked that girls, alone, would probably be lost in the great, dark picnic place, for the pine trees grew so close there, the grounds were often called "Twilight Grove"; but Alice only smiled broadly and replied:

"You just wait--the woods may be enchanted."

"Splendid idea," declared Tavia, "I do need so much a little Brownie or a goblin to help me with my housework. Fancy going home with a dear little Jackanapes to carry my 'dinner pail'!" and at this suggestion every one seemed to enjoy the grotesque idea that Tavia had outlined.

The grove was finally reached, and the happy picnic party lost no time in leaving the wagons, and making for the "best spots."

But no sooner had they entered the great tall gateway than they were set upon by a tribe of very lively goblins, for, from behind tree and bush there darted upon the unsuspecting girls a rollicking, frolicking band of boys--the boys' school having come to the grove to surprise the girls, and help them enjoy the breaking up picnic.

"I told you we might find the woods enchanted," said Alice who, of course had learned of the secret, as it was Mr. MacAllister who provided the wagons for the boys as well as for the girls.

Such running about and such shouting! Some lads had hidden in the pines and now as the girls ran through the grove, the "goblins" dropped down upon their unsuspecting heads.

Tavia and Alice helped make things livelier by gathering up parasols and lunch boxes that had been left in the wagons for safety. These they gave to the boys, who lost no time in forming a brigade, parasols in the air and boxes under arms, to the distress and dismay of the unlucky owners.

But there was still another surprise in store for the school children. When everything was fairly settled down for a day in the woods, a two seated carriage drove in, and in this were President of the Town Council, Franklin MacAllister; the Treasurer of Dalton, Major Dale, Squire Travers and Ralph Willoby.

Wild cheers went up from the woods as the party entered the grove; first for the president, then for the major and a "hip-hip" and series of hurrahs for the new squire.

Certainly it was jolly to have such a crowd in the shady woods. The officials told Miss Ellis they came to get acquainted with the pupils of the Dalton schools. Also, they said, it was quite necessary to look

after so important a gathering officially, as there was the lake, and other dangers, to which over enthusiastic youths might be more or less exposed.

Major Dale and Mr. MacAllister only remained long enough to see that everything was satisfactorily started, and then left, charging Ralph Willoby and Squire Travers to act as special officers. That this was a wise precaution was plainly demonstrated before the day ended.

Toward noon the merry-makers scattered throughout the spacious grounds, looking for particularly pleasant spots to eat lunch. This was by no means a difficult matter, for there were rustic benches built around wonderful trees, besides little caves lined with soft pine needles and covered with brown mounds of them.

The diversity of natural beauties made this grove famous, for many miles around, and never before, perhaps, was every nook and corner so thoroughly explored.

Ralph and the squire roamed around, seeing to it that boys in boats kept a safe distance from the falls coming from the gates and old water wheel.

From this falls the roaring of the water could be heard for a considerable distance, and so noisy were the rapids a person might shout at another but a few feet away without being able to make his voice heard.

But the falls had a strange charm for Dorothy, and after lunch she wandered there all alone, just to see, to think and to be quiet. Other attractions had now claimed the attention of her companions, and she sat there, enjoying the falls alone.

She could scarcely hear a voice through the woods, so loudly did the falls splash and splatter.

Who, in her place, could have heard a man stealing up to that very spot? Who could know a scoundrel was there, at that moment ready to seize Dorothy?

A rough hand clutched her slender arm!

That man--Anderson--was glaring into her eyes! Dorothy screamed shrilly.

"Hush!" commanded the man, "or I'll throw you over the falls!" and his hand was upon Dorothy's throat, preventing further outcry.

"Tell me," he growled, "did Miles Burlock leave his money with your father?"

Poor Dorothy felt as if the world had gone, and all the woes of death were upon her!

Looking about him hastily the man loosed his hold on her throat for an answer, but instead another shrill scream rent the air.

"You little fool!" he muttered, "do you want me to throw you over?"

But at that moment an answer came--Ralph Willoby bounded through the grove and had Dorothy in his arms before she could realize he was there! Then with a look of baffled rage the man disappeared.

"Ralph!" whispered Dorothy.

"You are all right now," the young man assured her, putting his arm firmly around the trembling girl, "if you feel faint I can carry you. Do not try to walk."

The noise of the falls was gone now--the sky was all black.

"Oh," gasped Dorothy, "I can't hear, or see, I am--"

It was welcome oblivion, however painful that clutch at her heart.

She could not remember--was it Ralph, or the squire?

She had been thinking how brave Ralph was--But now she could not think, it was all dark night!

CHAPTER XIX

A SURPRISE TRIP

When Ralph Willoby carried his senseless burden to the platform, where, so short a time before, the girl had been as merry as any of her playmates, Squire Travers determined upon one thing--to form a searching party of all the boys to scour the woods from tree to stump and if possible run down the villain who had attacked Dorothy.

The fainting girl was soon revived by the careful ministrations of Miss Ellis, assisted by pupils following her directions; and, before the half-conscious girl realized what had happened to her, the boys were running through the woods, led by the squire and Ralph, bent on finding Anderson.

But such reflections were of little use now that the harm was done. Dorothy was very weak indeed. She felt as if those sinuous fingers were still about her throat, and she could see those terrible eyes peering into hers in spite of all her efforts to forget her awful experience.

Some boys had already been sent off to the nearest place where it would be possible to get a conveyance to take her home, and they now returned

with a covered carriage.

Into this Miss Ellis and Dorothy were assisted, while the remainder of the girls were soon ready to leave the grounds in the large picnic wagons.

The boys "to a man" remained in the woods, helping diligently in, what now seemed to be, a useless search.

Over the narrow plank, just above the dam, the man no doubt had escaped to the other side, where the old ruins of a mill, with a big water wheel, made a safe hiding place for the fellow.

Squire Travers was much annoyed and worried over the occurrence. To think such a thing could happen with him right there, in the woods, seemed incredible.

But Ralph assured him a similar thing had happened in the public streets of Dalton, and the same man had gotten away. Why should it be strange then that he would be able to make his escape in a dense woods?

"But he must be caught," insisted the squire, "if we have to canvass the entire town and surrounding places to get him."

Some boys suggested that they disguise themselves as girls impersonating Dorothy and Tavia, and then wait to be "caught" while help remained close at hand. But it was decided such a ruse would hardly work that day, as the man would know well enough the girls would not again leave themselves liable to attack.

It was a very discouraged band of boys, with Squire Travers and Ralph Willoby as their leaders, that wended their way back to Dalton Center that evening. The picnic, of course, had been spoiled, but that did not amount to anything--it was the attack on Dorothy, and the escape of her assailant that concerned the searching party.

The squire and Ralph upon reaching town went directly to the office of President MacAllister, and the result of the meeting held there marked an epoch in the history of the township of Dalton. The new squire had outlined a plan that every suspicious character found in the place should be apprehended at once, and no sooner had this edict gone forth than the suspected ones very quietly took their departure. While it was generally believed the trouble had to do with a personal affair, there seemed danger of course to all, while such persons as this "tramp" were at liberty.

But confidence was at once established by the ruling of the squire, which put an end to the reign of terror, and Dalton became once more a pleasant place to live in.

The details of government had little interest now for Dorothy Dale, as she tossed feverishly about on her bed that night dreaming of the awful man. Dr. Gray had recommended that some one remain with her, on account

of her nervous condition, and Tavia insisted on being allowed to sit up with her friend.

A cot was arranged in Dorothy's room for Tavia, but she was too anxious about the sick one to sleep. What if Dorothy should die? What a lonely world this would be for Tavia without her.

Several times during the night Aunt Libby came in and tried to induce Tavia to take another room, and allow her to stay with Dorothy, but the volunteer nurse would not leave her post.

"Do go, Tavia," said Dorothy, who had just opened her eyes, and heard Aunt Libby's argument, "I'm all right now; only nervous."

"But I've promised myself a whole night with you, and I'm not going to be chased away, just at the witching hour," Tavia insisted.

But tired nature produced an argument incontrovertible, and when Tavia stretched out on the comfortable cot, and tried to chat as lively to Dorothy as if it had been mid-day on the side porch, she began to feel drowsy, then she noticed Dorothy did not answer promptly, and so she made her words "long and draggy" as mothers do when babies show signs of "giving in." Presently there was a hush--both nurse and patient were sound asleep.

When Dr. Gray called the next morning he advised a complete change for Dorothy. She was physically well enough, he said, but the shock to her nervous system might result in complete prostration, unless her mind was speedily disabused of the unpleasant memory.

Major Dale knew this advice was wise, and he concluded to send Dorothy to visit his sister, Mrs. Winthrop White, of North Birchland.

"Pleasant company," said the doctor to Major Dale as he left, "is all the girl wants. I wouldn't wonder but that little friend of hers--the lively one,--would help her, if it could be made convenient for her to go along."

Convenient? That uncertainty had nothing to do with circumstances important to his daughter's health, Major Dale decided. If Tavia's company would be beneficial to Dorothy's health Tavia should go to North Birchland with Dorothy.

The question of school did not signify, either, the major reasoned, for if Tavia could not afford to lose the remaining weeks in the term he would see that they were made up for, amply.

Arrangements were quickly made, letters dispatched back and forth, and before the girls had time to think it over themselves, they were told to be ready for the morning train.

"Oh, isn't it perfectly grand!" exclaimed the excited Tavia, "but do you think, Doro, I will be able to behave myself, to eat properly and all

that?"

"Why, Tavia," answered Dorothy, "you will find real aristocratic people are as simple as we are in manners; it is only those who try to be 'somebody,' and who do not know how, that make such a fuss over everything. Aunt Winnie is a lovely lady--we call her Winnie from Winthrop, because her own name is Ruth and we have another Aunt Ruth out West."

"Lucky thing I had my 'new' dress, and all the other things Aunt Mary sent by express last week. And father's new suit case his men presented him with when he left the factory--wasn't that providential?" asked Tavia.

Dorothy admitted it was fortunate, and so, as this was the very evening before their departure, the girls arranged such matters as required consultation and then hurried off to attend to so many little things necessary for travelers.

Aunt Libby could not hide a tear when Dorothy put her arms about the wrinkled neck, but when Major Dale helped his daughter to step upon the train platform he was smiling; glad to have her go it seemed. Joe told Johnnie afterwards that was the way soldiers always act when they face trouble.

Mrs. Travers was really glad to have Tavia go, and she did not deny it. It was such a chance for her, she told Aunt Libby, as they went home from the depot, and Tavia, she declared, was a girl who always made the most of her chances.

As the train flew along, or Dalton flew away, as it seemed from the car windows, both girls indulged in a very creditable sentiment--a streak of homesickness.

"It will be fun, of course," remarked Tavia, "but it's creepy to leave them all."

Passengers about them soon attracted their attention sufficiently to make the journey interesting. Tavia had such a way of seeing things to make Dorothy laugh, that little of interest escaped her.

Old ladies with black silk bags were her especial prey, and these she never failed to analyze--according to her own special method.

Women with babies also afforded no end of amusement to Tavia, and when she found a regular nursery cooking outfit in the "end room" of the car she could scarcely be restrained.

"I could make you the nicest clam bouillon," she told Dorothy, "and besides cooking, that little alcohol lamp is just the thing for hair crimping. I will crimp mine if I can find anything to make a hot poker of in this train."

"You really must not touch anything," Dorothy insisted, alarmed lest Tavia should do something reckless.

"Touch anything? Why my dear girl I have tested the entire outfit, and I am going to get one just like it for my hasty breakfasts."

The woman to whom the "entire outfit" belonged was now almost asleep beside her baby, on the end sofa, and Tavia assuring Dorothy she would stay there indefinitely, sallied forth to further investigate the mysteries of a nursery cooking outfit, en route.

CHAPTER XX

EVENTFUL JOURNEY

As Tavia reached the end sofa, upon which a pretty golden-haired baby lay curled beside a sleepy mother, she made a motion to attract the child's attention. The little one saw it at once, promptly slipped down and stole away from the sofa without in the least disturbing the woman.

The tot followed Tavia to the little end room--Dorothy saw her going, and though feeling very drowsy herself (which really was the reason Tavia left her alone) Dorothy kept her eyes opened long enough to see that the mother was sound asleep, and had not missed her baby.

"I am sure Tavia will take good care of her," thought Dorothy, as she settled down for a rest, "she is so fond of children, and it will be a change for the child--traveling must be very tiresome to such little ones."

The train rumbled on. Dorothy thought of home, of the good father and two dear brothers she had left there. Then she wondered what would happen at North Birchland. It was such a lovely summer place, and her relatives there were sure to do all they could to make the stay pleasant.

In the White family there were besides Mrs. Winthrop White, her two sons, Edward and Nathaniel, aged sixteen and fourteen years. Professor White, their father, had died suddenly some years before, while on an expedition out in quest of scientific data, but the White family possessed almost unlimited means, so that Major Dale's sister, while lonely enough in life without her husband, had the pleasant duty of bringing up two talented and good looking boys in a way that befitted the positions they would occupy as their father's sons--the White family being among the most aristocratic in New York state.

Dorothy had not seen her cousins in three years, the boys' time, between vacations, being spent at school, and the intervals of late being occupied with trips abroad. As she traveled on now, and became more and

more sleepy Dorothy wondered if Nat were as full of mischief as he used to be when he visited Dalton, and if Ned still spent his spare time chasing butterflies to add new specimen to his collection.

But even these interesting reflections are not to be compared with such sedative influence as the rumbling of a train with a summer breeze coming in the window, and the girl, weary enough from her fright at the falls and its consequent shock to her nervous system soon forgot to think--she was asleep.

Meanwhile Tavia was occupied with the pretty baby in the end compartment. The child was about three years old, and remarkably communicative for her age. The little alcohol lamp, she told Tavia, was used to heat her milk, also to curl her hair, for mamma never took her to the hotel without curls, she said.

To bear out this statement, Lily, that was the little stranger's name, produced from a satchel under the wash basin a tiny pair of curling irons.

It seemed like fate to Tavia,--there was the very thing she had been wishing for--curling tongs.

"Let's try it," she suggested, as Lily prattled on about the wonderful "real" curls that the iron could make.

A careful investigation revealed to Tavia the secrets of the alcohol lamp. Everything was there--even to matches.

Being sure the lamp was placed firmly upon the marble slab, Tavia struck a match and lighted the wick.

"There," she said with evident satisfaction, "that part was easy enough."

"You put the iron right in there," directed Lily, and Tavia promptly followed the advice.

"Sit on my lap while it heats," Tavia told the child, not thinking it safe to allow her to move about in the small place with a strange kind of stove burning.

The child jumped up eager to hear a story. The wood-kind, full of bears with remarkable appetites, pleased her most, Tavia discovered, and it was in such a mental delight that the child passed a very happy little "minute."

"It must be hot--" said Tavia.

She turned and at that very moment a strange flash shot up to the ceiling!

An explosion! Then such a blinding flame!

With the child still in her arms Tavia made a dash for the door. Frantically she pulled at it but it would not open! The child screamed piteously.

"Help! Help!" shouted Tavia, clutching at the knob with one hand, while she clung to the child with the other.

Instantly Dorothy was on her feet and down at that little door.

"Open it!" she screamed, for the smell of smoke had reached her on the outside.

Without waiting for an answer, or for those at hand to act, Dorothy jumped to a seat and grasped the bell rope.

At that moment the door gave in to Tavia's pulling, and she fell headlong out into the aisle with the baby in her arms.

The train stopped, and brakemen were now running through the cars in search of the trouble. Passengers had broken the tool boxes and were fighting the spreading flames with hand grenades and portable extinguishers. Fainting women called for attention--among these being Lily's mother.

Tavia was now lifted to a seat, and Dorothy had called into her ears that the baby was safe--she was not even scratched!

But Tavia was not so fortunate, for an ugly red mark showed where the tongue of fire scorched her, and her hair--

One side was entirely burned off!

Dorothy's heart sank as she noticed the loss, but it was nothing, of course, compared to what might have happened to the baby.

The excitement in the rear of the car had, by this time subsided somewhat, showing that the flames were extinguished. Lily, safe and uninjured, sat in her mother's lap--no danger of her getting away again evidently.

Among the passengers was a doctor who offered his services to Tavia. The burns were slight, he declared but there was danger of shock, and the loss of her beautiful hair was to be regretted.

Tavia tried to laugh to assure Dorothy she was all right, and then she insisted upon talking about the accident.

"The lamp did not explode," she declared. "The fire came from the other end of the room."

The trainmen listened anxiously to this report. They were obliged to make a most careful investigation, and Tavia was very willing to help

them. Professional looking men crowded around--one who introduced himself to the doctor as a well known lawyer of Rochester called Dorothy aside and offered to look out for the interests of the injured girl.

"Whatever you think best," Dorothy said, "I have never had any experience with law. But if you think we should take account of it at all I should be most grateful for your help."

Then Tavia was taken into a private compartment, and there, with Dorothy encouraging her, and the lawyer and doctor listening, she told the story of the accident.

"I had lighted the alcohol lamp," she declared, "but I am positive that did not explode. The flash came from behind us--the other end of the room. Then the door would not open--oh how dreadful that was!"

For a moment Tavia covered her eyes, then she resumed:

"I heard Dorothy's voice and that seemed to keep me from falling in the smoke. At last the door opened and that's all I know."

"Now, you just rest here," the doctor advised, "while Mr. French and I do some outside investigating."

Then it was that the important clew was discovered, for at the very door of the little room, where the fire had raged, was found a piece of glass with a label!

Gasoline!

"She was right," declared the lawyer, taking possession of the tell-tale piece of bottle, the railroad men would have been so glad to have seen first, "this tells the story. A bottle of gasoline exploded."

Looking carefully over the damaged room the lawyer made some entries in his note book and, with the doctor, approached Lily's mother. The woman positively refused to make known her name, and even the railroad men had not succeeded in learning who she was.

"That my baby is safe," she declared, "is all I ask. People saw the girl coax her off, but even this I am entirely willing to overlook, and I will positively make no claims against the company."

The doctor saw the child was not in the least injured, and also was convinced there was no danger of shock to the little nervous system, as the tot looked upon the whole occurrence as "good fun," so the professional men withdrew their offer to serve either the woman or her child.

AT AUNT WINNIE'S

Dorothy had fastened Tavia's hair up under her hat, so that the one long and uninjured side covered the burnt ends and hid the damage. She looked like a pretty boy, Dorothy told her, and the red line about her neck was not noticeable at all, for around the scar Dorothy had pinned her own white silk handkerchief. Except for a few tell-tale spots of "scorch" marking the back of her new dress, from her appearance Tavia might never have been suspected of being the heroine of a railroad accident.

"Oh, there is Aunt Winnie!" exclaimed Dorothy as the train stopped, and she looked out of the window near the door.

A depot wagon was drawn up to the platform, and in it sat a stylishly dressed woman.

If Tavia had felt "alarmed at the style" as she afterward told Dorothy, the moment Mrs. White grasped her hand in welcoming her to Birchland all nervousness left her, for Mrs. White had an unmistakable way of greeting her guests--she really was glad to see them. Dorothy climbed up beside her aunt, while Tavia took the spare seat at front, and it seemed to her the world had suddenly fallen from its level, everything was beneath her. She had risen physically, mentally and socially from her former self--the first ride on a box seat was an inspiration to the country girl, and Tavia felt its influence keenly.

Dorothy chatted pleasantly to her aunt, occasionally referring to something to Tavia to give her a chance to join in the conversation and Tavia noticed that Dorothy had already cheered up wonderfully.

"I suppose this is the sort of company Doro belongs in," Tavia thought. "There is something so different about society people."

Mrs. White certainly was different. She knew exactly how to interest the girls, and she also knew how to make them feel at home. She had asked all sorts of polite questions about Dalton folks, and showed the keenest interest in the new appointment of Squire Travers. Tavia insisted that Dorothy had elected him, and this item of news Mrs. White begged Tavia would repeat to the "boys" as she declared they would be "just delighted to hear how their girl cousin managed Dalton politics."

The boys were at camp, Mrs. White told the girls, and an early visit to their quarters was among the treats promised.

From the station to the "Cedars" was but a short ride, and when the carriage turned into the cedar shaded driveway Tavia felt another "spasm" of alarm--it was such an imposing looking place.

"This is where you may play games," said Mrs. White, pointing out the broad campus behind the trees. "The boys have no end of sport hiding in the cedars, and I am sure you girls will find them jolly. There are some

very pleasant neighbors at the next cottage--one young girl among them."

"This is splendid," Tavia said. "We can invent new games here. I think 'tree-toad' would be a novelty."

Presently the luggage was taken in by the man, while the girls followed Mrs. White up the broad staircase to their rooms.

"Now, my dears," said their hostess, as she opened the doors to two connecting rooms, "here is where you will 'pitch your tents' as the boys would say. I hope you will be comfortable, but should you need anything Dorothy knows the plan of this house--just ask for anything you want. I'll leave you now. We will lunch as soon as you feel refreshed."

"But, auntie," called Dorothy, as Mrs. White passed into the hall, "won't you come here a moment? I have a very interesting thing to tell you," and as Mrs. White stepped back to the door again, Dorothy snatched the hat from Tavia's head.

Instantly the "installment" hair fell to the waist on one side, and clung to Tavia's neck at the other.

"Why!" exclaimed the aunt. "What on earth has happened to the child's locks?"

"Hair tonic model," laughed Dorothy, "sit down, auntie, and I will tell you."

Mrs. White took the uninjured mass of golden brown tresses into her hands.

"Some one stole them, of course," she ventured.

"One more guess!" smiled Dorothy.

At this the scar on Tavia's neck was discovered.

"Not in a fire?" exclaimed the aunt.

"Exactly," declared Dorothy, and then she told of the railroad accident.

"Why, you poor dear!" sighed Mrs. White to Tavia, "you must be quite ill from the shock. Get into bed immediately, and I will see how we can doctor you up," and before Tavia had a chance to protest against the "treatment" she found herself in bed, shoes and dress off, and wrapped in a comfortable robe Dorothy had brought in her bag.

"Now," teased Dorothy, "you wanted to know how it feels to be sick. How do you like it?"

"Best ever," replied the girl in the pillows. "Make it incurable please."

"Here," announced their hostess, appearing at the door with a steaming bowl that smelled good. "Just drink this bouillon. I believe that more lives might be saved by the hot bouillon process than by the reported efficacy of hot whisky. One stays hot, the other turns into chills. Just drink this dear, and I will banish Dorothy. I know how she can talk when one should sleep--she roomed with me one summer," and at this Dorothy was whisked out of the room by her aunt, and Tavia left to commune with the pleasant aroma of hot bouillon with chopped parsley flavoring.

"Riches are not to be despised," she commented, when the paneled door closed her away from friends for the moment. "I wonder Major Dale does not let Dorothy stay with her aunt; she would know exactly how to train her in society ways, and Dorothy is plainly cut out to be a leader where ever she goes. I suppose," reflected the girl, "some day Mrs. White will introduce her into her social world and then--"

A step in the hall aroused her from her rather tangled reverie, and presently Dorothy stood before her with an immense bunch of "Jack" roses.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tavia, in unfeigned admiration, "have you been to heaven stealing flowers?"

"No, an angel tossed them down," replied Dorothy, "and her card said they were for you." Whereat she held out to Tavia the "angelic" bouquet.

"Oh Dorothy Darling Dale! I never saw such flowers! I have always thought the wild kinds prettier than those that grew so proud-like but there is just as much difference between a Jack-in-the-pulpit and a real Jack rose as there is between you and me!"

"Well Jack, I like you just as well as if you grew in a hot house-- better, because you have taught me the value of life's storms--you have grown outside and know the music of the winds," and with the flowers she gave her friend all the hug she dared risk in the presence of the "railroad line" on Tavia's neck.

"But you have the sweetness of the greenhouse," insisted Tavia, "and that blows off with the music of the winds."

"Well, we will not quarrel over our virtues," said Dorothy, "the thing to discuss at present is what are you going to do with the railroad money?"

"What money?" inquired Tavia, showing surprise.

"Your damages, of course. How much do you calculate your other braid was worth?"

"Not worth talking about."

"But if you were offered a fair price for it you would not refuse?" persisted Dorothy.

"No, I'd take most anything from a cream soda to a twenty-five cent piece."

"Well, my dear, now compose yourself. Get a good hold on the chair near you, or better still sit down, since you insist on getting out of bed. I have a very lively piece of news for you--the sensational kind."

"Let her go," called Tavia grasping the chair with both hands.

"It is this. Aunt Winnie says you will undoubtedly received damages for the accident. She says Mr. French is a noted lawyer and he will possibly arrange it so that all you will have to do is to put your name to the signing-off paper. The fact that you lighted the lamp, auntie says, will not do away with the fact that a careless employee left that explosive there."

"Do you know, Dorothy," said Tavia in her most serious tone, "the only thing that has consoled me for asking that baby in there is, that she told me she was going in for a drink of water, and had she done so she would, or at least might, have tasted the poison stuff. She was the most meddlesome child and might have killed herself."

"Certainly her mother would have allowed her to roam about as she pleased," said Dorothy, "for people told me after the accident that little Lily had been in almost every seat in the car, while her mother curled herself up on that sofa. It is a strange thing to me that most women travelers are more careful of their dogs than of their babies. Did you notice that blonde with the soft leather bag? Well, she had a poodle in that bag, it is against the rules, you know, to keep animals in the passenger cars, but that lady had her bag open on the seat, and every time a brakeman came through she would pull the string and close the bag. Then once in a while she would let the dog run around a bit. But indeed she did not let it get away like Lily's mother let her go."

"And do you really think the railroad people will pay me damages?"

"I am almost sure of it. Aunt Winnie is a very clever business woman, and if they come while we are here it will be all the better for you. Just think! Suppose they should offer five hundred dollars!"

"I am too poor to be able to think of five hundred dollars all at once. I will have to try it on the installment plan. But wouldn't it be jolly if I did get a good sum," and Tavia's eyes took on a far-away look--perhaps all the way to Dalton and happiness.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PRICE OF TAVIA'S TRESSES

A week had passed at North Birchland, with Dorothy and Tavia enjoying every succeeding hour better than the last, when the expected lawyers arrived to interview the victim of the railroad fire.

Fortunately Mrs. White was at home, and more fortunately still was the arrival of Mr. French with the strange lawyer.

Tavia was flushed and nervous when Dorothy helped her to dress for the interview.

"Now don't you mind it a bit," said Dorothy. "Just keep thinking that you might have been very seriously injured, and that the railroad people should be more careful for the sake of others. Then you will forget all about the lawyers and their statements."

Mrs. White was talking to the men in the reception room. Certainly the shock had been severe, she said, and only the fact that Miss Travers was unusually lively in temperament had saved her from more serious results.

Dorothy entered the room with Tavia.

"These are the young ladies," said Mr. French, introducing them. "This one was shut in the room with the fire."

Tavia felt her face flush, and her nerves throb painfully. It was so embarrassing to be the object of such scrutiny.

Then began a fire of questions, Mr. French in every instance indicating how Tavia should answer. The railroad lawyer, Mr. Banks, trying of course, to trip Tavia into admitting that the lamp exploded first, and the bottle blew up after. But Tavia was positive in declaring that the blaze came from the far corner of the room, whereas the stove was directly at her side. This was also indicated by a map which Mr. French produced, and upon which Tavia marked the various spots where the bench stood, where the marble slab with the stove was situated, and where the bottle appeared to come from--a far corner of the slab.

"Will you let down your hair, please," said Mr. French, and Dorothy promptly drew the pins from Tavia's tresses, allowing the unscorched braid to fall below her waist, while the burnt ends were charred almost to her neck, the red scar showing how close to her head the flames had really crept.

"That is a loss, of course," said Mr. French, taking the long waves in his hand, "but it shows the great danger her life was in. Also, Mr. Banks, notice this scar. That was dressed on the train by Dr. Brown, of Fairview."

Both lawyers examined the scar. Tavia felt as if she would run from the room, the very moment they took their hands off her, but Dorothy smiled encouragingly, and Mrs. White rang for a maid to fetch a glass of water. This had the effect of distracting Tavia, who now stood there being

cross-examined like an expert witness.

Finally Mr. French said:

"That will do, thank you."

Tavia had barely tasted the water, and as she crossed the room to reach her chair, she felt dizzy. The next moment she was in Mrs. White's arms, unconscious.

"I saw she was pale," exclaimed the lady, while the gentlemen opened the windows and Dorothy ran for some restoratives. "But I did not think she would go off like that."

It did not take long, however, to revive the fainting girl, and when she had been helped to her room the lawyers held a conference with Mrs. White and then left the Cedars.

"Wasn't that dreadfully stupid!" sighed Tavia, as she lay stretched out on the soft, white bed.

"Not at all, my dear," replied Mrs. White, who at that moment appeared at the door. "You could not have done better had you been coached, for it shows how the shock has unnerved you. And you may as well know that the company has offered to settle for five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!" echoed Tavia.

"Yes, my dear. For my part I should count a braid of hair such as you lost worth twice that sum, but even at that price I could not obtain it. No one ever values a fine head of hair until it is gone--like the dry well, you know. But you are young enough to grow another braid, and that is the beauty of it. Mr. French said your father gave him full power to act, and so he will accept the company's offer. And the fine thing about it is he does not want a commission--only his expenses, which are nominal."

"Isn't that perfectly splendid!" exclaimed Dorothy, throwing her arms about Tavia.

"Some people are born lucky, and others have luck thrust upon them," said Tavia pleasantly. "In this case it was as usual. I did the mischief and Dorothy did the rest. That lawyer would never have noticed me if Dorothy hadn't shown her pluck--why, she had my flaming hair wrapped up in a brakeman's coat before he had decided whether to throw it out of the window or over the ice cooler. He seemed to be worried about the ice, for it was directly in the path of the fire."

"Nonsense," said Dorothy, blushing. "He very politely pulled off his coat when I asked him to, and of course, he did not know just what to do with it."

"Lucky thing it was a railroad coat," went on Tavia, "or we might have

had to pay damages."

"Lucky thing Dorothy had such presence of mind, at any rate," remarked Mrs. White, "for another touch of that flame and your face, Tavia, might have had a different bill against the railroad company. However, as it ends like a love story, we will live happily ever after," and she gave Tavia such an affectionate kiss, that the girl felt a strange nearness to her new-found friend as if she had been suddenly adopted, socially at least, into Dorothy's family.

"And now, my dears," went on their hostess, "I expect the boys out from camp this afternoon, so you must rest up, and look your prettiest."

Tavia sat up and looked about her.

"Did you ever hear that story about why a widower was like a baby?" she asked Dorothy. "Well, I feel just like him. They say he cried for the first six months, then sat up and looked around and it was hard to pull him through the second summer. Now I am looking around, but when I get my five hundred I am afraid I will hardly last through the second summer."

"I know you will like the boys," remarked Dorothy.

"But who will cut my poor old hair?" sang Tavia to the meerschaum pipe tune.

"We will have to put it up in the folded fire escape fashion," said Dorothy, "until we can drive out to a barber's. It is too late this afternoon."

"Whatever will momsey say?" thought Tavia aloud.

"That you would have made a very good-looking boy," replied Dorothy. "I am sure I never saw a girl to whom short hair was so becoming."

"It must look well with a five hundred-dollar note for a background. I tell you, Doro, money covers a multitude of crimes. I wonder if little Lily of the fire room has cooled off yet."

"But you haven't seen the new clothes auntie had brought us--yes us, for she has not forgotten you. You are well able to pay bills now, you know," and Dorothy gave a mischievous little tug at Tavia's elbow. "But wait, wait till you see what you are to wear this very evening. The box has just come up, and I will open it."

Whereupon Dorothy pulled in from the hall door a great purple box labeled "robes." Tavia was on her knees beside it before Dorothy had a chance to untie the strings. What girl does not like to see brand, new, pretty dresses come out of their original box?

Layers of tissue paper were first unwrapped, then a glow of brilliant red shown through the last covering.

"Whew!" exclaimed Tavia, "a rainbow gown, I'll bet. Then she gave her usual text, as Dorothy called her spontaneous rhymes:

"Breathes there a girl with soul so dead,
Who never to herself has said,
I love to wear a dress bright red!"

"And I love red better than butter, and I love butter better than ice cream--so there! Dorothy Dale, that dress on top I claim."

The "bright red" was in full view now, and it was really a beautiful gown. Not extravagantly so, but as Dorothy said "exquisitely so."

The material was of dimity, over muslin, and tiny rows of "val." lace formed a yoke and edgings. A broad sash of flowered ribbon--all in shades of red, with bows of the same in narrow width finished the shoulders.

"Yes, it is for you," said Dorothy, "Auntie said red would suit you."

"I have always loved it, but folks said my hair was red."

"Indeed it never was. And don't you know how great dressmakers insist upon sandy haired girls wearing red? The real red in material contrasts with hair red, so as to make the brown red browner. There now, is a new puzzle. When is brown red?"

"When a sassy boy calls it red," promptly answered Tavia, remembering how she always feared the "red-head" epithet.

"Isn't it sweet?" exclaimed Dorothy, holding the new gown up for inspection.

"Oh, a perfect love!" declared Tavia. "I thought my Rochester creation--doesn't that sound well--simply 'glorious,' but this is beatific!"

"Like a sunset," suggested Dorothy. "But I must get acquainted with mine."

Another layer of paper and a pale blue robe was extracted.

"Oh, I know," cried Tavia, clapping her hands like a delighted child, "It's morning and evening. I'm sunrise and you are evening. Or I'm sunset and you are evening."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, too enraptured to say more.

"And with your yellow head you will look like an angel."

"Now, see here, Miss Sunset and Sunrise, I don't mind being cloudy or even starry, nor yet heavenly, but don't you dare go one latitude or longitude further. I am mortally afraid Aunt Winnie has elected to wear

amethyst this very evening, and when the combination gets together I expect something will happen--something like Mt. Pelee, you know."

"We might call it our elementary evening," went on Tavia, "and then look out for storms. You said the boys were coming?"

"Coming!" and Dorothy sprang to the door. "They are here now. Listen to that shout? That's Ned. Oh, I must run down. Come along," and before Tavia had a chance to "collect her manners" she was bowing after Dorothy's profuse introduction.

"I've heard of Miss Travers," said Edward pleasantly, while Nat was "weighing" Dorothy with one hand, and attempting to shake the other in Tavia's direction.

"You must call her Tavia," insisted Dorothy, getting away from Ned, "or if you prefer you may call her Octavia--she has a birthday within the octave of Christmas."

"Should have been called Yule, for yule-tide," said Nat. "Not too late yet, is it Tavia?"

Mrs. White was smiling at the good times "her children" had already made for themselves. She now insisted upon calling Dorothy daughter and she was so kind to Tavia that she made no distinction but said "daughters" in addressing both.

"Just see, boys," said their mother, unpinning Tavia's now famous half head of hair, "that is all there is left."

"Never!" exclaimed Nat, handling the braid gingerly. "How much did you settle for?"

"That would be telling," said Mrs. White, "but what I want you boys to do is to drive the girls down to your barber's. You said it was a very nice place."

"Tip-top," interrupted Ned. "Bay rum or old rum or anything else from oyster cocktail to Castile soap."

"But have you seen ladies go there?" asked the mother.

"Took 'em there myself," insisted the younger boy. "Don't you remember the day Daisy Bliss got burrs in her hair? Of course I did not put them there--"

"Oh, no!" drawled Ned.

"Well, she always was a dub at ducking," went on the other, "but I put up for the hair cut all the same."

"Now do listen, boys," and the mother spoke firmly. "Tavia must have her hair trimmed. I tried to get a hair-dresser to come out here, but we

could not have it done until after the railroad man appraised it. So now the hair-dresser could not get here until after Sunday. That is why I am having recourse to a barber."

"Couldn't do better, mother," spoke up Ned, who had been trying to get a word in with Dorothy "on the other side."

"Then run along, girls, get your things. Don't dress up; it is country all the way, and the dinner folks are not out yet. It will be pleasanter to fix up after the operation," said Mrs. White.

"But I say, momsey," called Nat after her as she went upstairs, "you wouldn't suggest a 'Riley,' would you?"

"Nathaniel White, if you dare get that girl's hair cut in any but the most lady-like fashion I'll--disinherit you!"

"Shadows of the poorhouse! Don't! I'll make the fellow trim it with a butter knife. Come along, children. I'll show you the newest in chaperonage at Mike's!"

Both girls appeared on the veranda to which the depot cart had been drawn up. Dorothy looked like a pond lily, Tavia had told her, in her light green dress with her yellow hair falling over it. Tavia too was attractive, she had on a brown dress with gold in it that reflected the glint of her hair, and, as Ned handed Nat the reins he whispered: "A stunner and a hummer."

"It's real jolly to have a girl around," Nat remarked to Tavia, who had the front seat beside him, "and mother is so fond of girls--I have always worn my hair long to please her."

"Quite a protection in summer, isn't it?" asked Tavia, noticing how the sunburn stopped where the hair began, and that otherwise the young man was much tanned.

"Yes, some. But a fellow can't expect to be a peachblow at Camp Hard Tack."

"It must be a great sport to camp," ventured Tavia.

"The greatest ever! I would like to go out on a ranch but mother says 'no, little boy, you must stay home,' so home I stay."

Dorothy and Ned were evidently enjoying themselves as well as those at front, for, it seemed to Tavia that Dorothy's laugh had not rung out so jolly in many weeks--so much had happened lately to dampen mirthful spirits.

"Just fancy," said Tavia turning back to Ned, "I was sent along to keep Dorothy lively, she was actually threatened with nervous prostration, and think, how lively I did keep her? Came nearing firing a train."

"Oh, anything for a change," politely answered Ned. "One cannot tell just what sort of tonic is best, I am sure she looks first rate."

"Bully," added Nat, "but don't worry that you've laid aside nursing, Yule, I have not been well myself. Ahem! Just finish off on me!"

"There comes our barber shop," called Ned, as a striped pole appeared in view. "Now for the artistic clip-the-clip. Mike is a genius, blushing unseen here. But I mean to set him up some day. Tried to get him out to camp but he shied when we told him there were no 'cops.' Mike loves 'cops,' when the fellows get busy with his tonsorial apparatus."

"Don't faint this time," Dorothy cautioned Tavia with a merry smile, thinking that those two boys would likely dip her in the brook at the side of the shop should she attempt anything like that.

"Indeed I know where and when to faint," responded Tavia. "Mr. French has a way about him--"

"But you never tried me," said Nat, making a funny move as if to catch an armful of thin air. "I am an authority on faints. Every girl at school says I'm a perfect dear, for catching falls at commencement time. They all keel over then."

They were in front of the barber shop now. Mike opened the door with such a bow Tavia could scarcely repress a smile.

Ned made the arrangements, and Tavia mounted the high chair, allowed Mike, the Italian, to tuck the apron around her neck, then all she could see was a very queer looking girl in the glass in front of her.

"Just trim it evenly," said Dorothy, walking up to the chair, and feeling it was hardly safe to trust the boys with the order.

Carefully the barber let down the heavy coil.

"What!" he exclaimed, seeing it was only "half a head." "Fire, you been in explosion?"

"Sure!" answered Ned, mechanically.

Then Mike went through a series of groans, grunts and jabs at the air.

"So shame," he wailed. "The hair is so fine--like gold, brown gold."

With many a sigh and groan the barber plied his shears, stopping constantly to give vent to his feelings with a shrug of his broad shoulders and deep guttural mutterings.

"Oh, quit gargling your throat, Mike, and get through with the job. The young lady is alive, you see, and expects to get back to the Cedars in time for breakfast," said Ned.

"I am sure that will do," said Dorothy at last, whereat Tavia gladly got out of the stuffy chair.

"Great!" both boys exclaimed in admiration as they saw how "smart" Tavia looked.

"It is becoming," said Dorothy.

"Handy," commented Tavia.

Presently the party was driving off again, Tavia indulging in the laughs she dared not take part in with the scissors at her ear, while Dorothy "scolded" the boys for making such sport of a poor foreigner.

"Poor indeed!" Ned echoed. "I wish we had some of his cash on hand. I mean the ready stuff. I have yet to make the acquaintance of a poor barber; especially the imported kind."

It was a jolly ride home--and the evening that followed was one full of pleasure.

[Illustration with caption: 'I AM SURE THAT WILL DO,' SAID DOROTHY AT LAST]

CHAPTER XXIII

IN SOCIAL ELEMENTS

Dorothy wore her "heavenly" blue dress, while Tavia "blazed out" in her sunset costume. As Dorothy had predicted Mrs. White was radiant in her beautiful amethyst chiffon, so that the elementary evening "panned out" exactly as scheduled,

Mrs. White was a handsome woman. As Ruth Dale, youngest sister of Major Dale, she had been a belle, and now as Mrs. Winthrop White she was acknowledged a social leader and a favorite.

Her hair had the same brightness that made Dorothy's so attractive, except that years had tarnished that of Mrs. White, while her niece had seen only sunshine in life to polish the golden warp that beauty loves to spin. There were many features in both that marked relationship, and it was always declared that Dorothy was a Dale both in character and features.

The broad veranda at the Cedars was lighted with a flood of summer moonbeams, and there was seated on the lounging chairs a gay party of young persons and a few "grown ups."

Tavia and Dorothy, Ned and Nat, besides Rosabel Glen, the young girl who

lived in the pretty cottage next the Cedars, were there, and with Mrs. White were Mrs. Theodore Glen and a visitor from Toledo, a Miss Battin.

In meeting Rosabel Glen the girls from Dalton were both conscious of making the acquaintance of a society girl, one who though still in her teens, knew exactly what to say to be polite, and precisely what to do to show off to the very best possible advantage. She had called at the Cedars in the afternoon and remained just fifteen minutes, which time Mrs. White informed the girls after her departure was the social limit for a first call.

"But we were talking of something that could not possibly be finished in that time," Dorothy had complained.

"All the better chance for Rosabel to show off her manners," said Mrs. White with a laugh, for she had never agreed that young girls should enter society on stilts.

But the evening was different, informal and almost jolly. (The "almost" belonged to Miss Rosabel while the "jolly" was looked after by Ned and Nat, Dorothy and Tavia feeling like an appreciative audience.) All sorts of topics were introduced by the unhappy boys, who never had a good time when the Glens were present, but all resulted in the same failure to make a general conversation of firmer consistency than monosyllables.

"But you must come out to camp," said Nat in desperation. "We have the jolliest quarters, on a high knoll, just off the lake front and not too far from the hotel--a hotel is not bad to have around when a good blow takes the roof off your head at midnight."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Rosabel, "you do not mean to say that your tents blow away in the night?"

"Not a bit particular as to time--night or day," went on the young man, "so long as they get away. Last time Ned clung to the ropes and the campers missed something for it was awfully dark."

"And you really were carried up by the force of the wind?" gasped the polite girl.

"And let down by it," admitted Ned, "I have a souvenir yet," rubbing his left arm.

"And girls camp!" gasped the one from the other cottage.

"Heaps of them. They're the best neighbors we've got. There's Camp Deb (all debutants you know), and I tell you their social guardians know how to fix them up for the season. They make a fellow think of the way fowls are treated before holiday time?"

"Oh," almost shrieked Rosabel, "Please don't!"

"But you ought to look into the treatment. I tell you those girls are

beauts. They get fun, exercise, fresh air and have the last good time they ever expect to have in this world. Poor dears, they must all be engaged next season, you know."

Dorothy and Tavia were enjoying this, Rosabel had seemed to forget their presence, she at once became so absorbed in the society talk.

"I would like to visit camp," she ventured.

"Come along then," said Nat good naturedly, "Our girls are coming out to-morrow."

Tavia gave a significant sigh. Who could have any fun "with that door-bell floral piece tagging on," she thought.

Mrs. Glen was appealed to and it was finally arranged that she, Mrs. White, and the younger set should go on the following afternoon to visit Camp Hard Tack.

When the nine o'clock bell rang the visitors promptly rose to go, nor were they detained by any overwhelming entreaties to prolong their stay.

"Of all the sticks," began Ned, when they were at a safe distance.

"Hush, Neddie, Rosabel is being properly brought up," interrupted Mrs. White with more smiles than frowns.

"Properly! Save the mark! And if I had been a girl would you have done that to me? I did hope that Dorothy might be made comfortable here for some time, but if that is contagious I'll take her home myself. A case like that must be fatal," and Ned shook his head seriously.

"And her cheeks?" asked Nat, "what do you call that?"

"The very best," replied Tavia, "I know that kind is two dollars an ounce. I saw it in Rochester."

"Then we'll fix her out at camp," decided Nat. "We will put up some kind of a game that calls for a face wash and a forfeit. If Rosy objects I'll get the boys to wash it for her."

"Oh, that would be rude," insisted Dorothy.

"Not for campers," insisted the unquenchable Nat, "It might be for ministers, but not for campers."

It was not late enough to leave the porch, so the talk drifted to Dalton matters.

"Now Dot," began Ned, "I'd like to hear more of the 'chaser' business. I am sure we have all heard the wrong story of it, and even at that I must admit it is not so slow--rather interesting. Give us the right version."

"Let Tavia tell it," Dorothy begged off.

"Well, who did the fellow turn out to be?" asked Ned.

"He hasn't turned out yet," replied Tavia. "The last we heard of him he tried to throw Dorothy over the falls--"

"Scamp," interrupted Ned. "Pity there's no fellows in Dalton big enough to lick a fellow like that."

"Oh, there are plenty of them," declared Dorothy, at once up in arms for the Dalton boys. "But he is such a coward he never appears except when he is sure we are alone."

"The entire boys' school hunted for him that day in the woods," added Tavia, "but he got away."

"What on earth is he after?" went on Ned.

"The Burlock money," promptly replied Dorothy. "At first we did not know that, but there is no doubt of it now. When he grabbed me he hissed into my ear, 'Did Miles Burlock leave his money with your father?' Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, "I can't bear to think of it yet."

"Excuse me, coz," spoke up Ned, "perhaps I should not have made you think of it."

"Indeed, I scarcely ever get it out of my mind. It just haunts me."

"That's why she left school," Tavia reminded them, "And I left to keep her company," she finished with a merry laugh at the idea, and its evident consequences.

"A blessing all around," said Nat. "What would we have done if neither of you left and we got left--for this good time. I hope mom will kidnap Dorothy."

"Indeed you cannot have her," declared Tavia. "I should pine away and die at Dalton without her."

"Then stay at Birchland," suggested Ned. "Plenty of room."

"But what does the fellow want with the Burlock money?" asked Nat, getting back to the interesting affair that still remained so much of a mystery.

"It's a long story," began Dorothy, "and it has not all been told yet. Burlock was, in some way, in Anderson's power. I was with father when poor Mr. Burlock told us about it. He declared it was all the result of too much liberty in youth and bad company?"

"Be warned, Nat, my boy," interrupted Ned, jokingly. "I must have the mater cut you down. 'And he rambled till the mater cut him down,'"

hummed the brother, paraphrasing the butcher song.

"Spare the allowance and cut anything else down you like," answered Nat.
"But please do not interrupt again."

"Then it seems," went on Dorothy, "Mr. Burlock had a lot of money left him. From that time on this Anderson followed Mr. Burlock and even succeeded in separating him from his family."

"But how did Burlock hold on to the cash all that time?" asked Ned.

"Oh, that was kept for him. He only had the interest of it. But lately a Mrs. Douglass, of Dalton, died; she had charge of the money because Mr. Burlock was not considered capable of taking care of it himself."

"And now," said Ned, "the major has it, and Anderson is trying to get it away by means of information he hopes to get from the major's daughter? Easy as a, b, c. But to whom is the money left?"

"To an unknown or unfound daughter," said Dorothy. "Her name is Nellie or Helen Burlock, and it was in hopes of locating her, upon a false clew which Anderson sent, that poor Mr. Burlock met his death."

"But Dorothy had him all fixed for heaven," said Tavia. "Yes, if ever a man died, hoping to be forgiven, it was Miles Burlock. Those who were with him said so, and it was all Dorothy's doings. I must admit I did joke her about it," Tavia said earnestly, "but she had done so many things girls never do, and she was not strong enough to keep it up, so we all had to try to discourage it. But you will have to come to Dalton to hear her praises sung. She is a regular home missionary--the kind they tell about in meetings, but who are too busy to come and talk about themselves."

"I am sure Dorothy is an angel," said Nat, putting his arm affectionately around his cousin. "I only hope she will save some of her goodness for me--I do need a mission."

"Indeed," answered Dorothy, "joking aside, you boys are very good and so attentive to your mother. She told me so herself."

"Oh," gasped Nat, "when did she say that? Is it too late to make a strike now? I am horribly short--short dinner this week you know."

"And there's Nellie," resumed Ned, determined to get at the bottom of the Burlock story. "Now she's to have money. What do you say, Nat, if we get on the case? Nellie might make it all right, you know."

"Great scheme, boy," said Nat, "you do the finding and I will act as your attorney."

"Isn't there any clue?" asked Ned.

"Yes, father is working on one, and I am so anxious to hear the result,"

said Dorothy. "Of course he will not write about it. I expect there will be lots of news when we get back to Dalton."

Tavia had been silent for some time. The boys had failed to "wake up her jokes," as they expressed it.

"Look here," said Ned tipping her chair back in a perilous way. "You can't claim to be sleepy for your eyes are just like stars. Nor need you pretend to be weeping inwardly for the coil of taffy we all forgot to bring back from Mikes' (if anything happens to that hair I'll have his license revoked), so now own up, what are you moping about?"

Dorothy was at Tavia's side instantly.

"You are tired, dear," she said. "Perhaps you are weak from shock. Let's go in."

"Indeed I'm all right--" stammered Tavia, but a hot tear fell on Dorothy's hand, and told a different story.

"Homesick!" whispered Ned as he kissed Dorothy good night. "She'll be all right to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PAINTED FACE

Human life seems so like that depicted in the elements about us; a patch of blue here, and a streak of blackness stealing up there to cover it. A glint of gold there and a flurry of smoke almost upon it. So with life: brightness is so closely followed by shadows that gloom and glow become inseparable. Perhaps the contrasts save us from the blinding glare of extremes; it may be well to have even our joys tempered with moderation.

It had been such a happy day--Tavia felt she had never before known how to enjoy life. There had been many happy times of course, in Dalton, and Dorothy had often surprised her with entirely unexpected little treats; but somehow this was different, there was so much to be enjoyed at once.

Ah, Tavia! that is why reaction comes so suddenly. You left Nature behind you in Dalton--human wild flowers have a hard time of it when first thrust upon the pavements of social concrete.

Dorothy was with Tavia in the pretty bedroom. The moonlight made its way in at the curtained windows, and the two girls were clinging to each other there on the cushioned seat, trying to "think it out," Dorothy said.

"I had such a lovely time," sobbed Tavia, "and every one had been so

good to me. But I could not help it Doro dear. When that Rosabel came I saw the difference--I saw I never could be your friend when we grew up. And then I got to thinking about home--Dorothy, I must go. I must talk about that money with dear mother and father and even little Johnnie--he did seem to need me so much! And I have been so selfish--to leave them all."

"Now, Tavia, you make me feel badly. It is I who am selfish to take you away, but I am sure your mother particularly wanted you to come, and your father was so pleased. I tell you, dear it is all that money. You just feel you cannot wait to talk all about it, and I don't blame you at all. You shall go home just as soon as you want to."

"But you must stay," said Tavia, brightening up at the thought of going home. "I came to be company for you, but you do not need me."

Was there just a sign of jealousy in her words? Dorothy instantly detected a change--Tavia drew herself up so like other girls, but so unlike Tavia.

"Not need you! Why, Tavia, who in all this world could take your place," and her arms were wound around the neck of the weeping girl, while the fondest sister-kiss was pressed to the tear-stained cheek.

"My, what a goose I am!" suddenly exclaimed Tavia, springing up. "I never was homesick or had the real blues in all my life, and I do not propose to do the baby act now. So there," and she gave a hearty hug to Dorothy. "I'm done with blubbering, and I'm more ashamed of myself than I was the day I ran away after the row with Sarah. Now, I'll beat you to bed, and to sleep, too, for that matter. We will have to do some tall snoring to catch up with the rosy Rosabel--her cheeks will make ours look like putty."

It was late, and Dorothy was glad to feel that Tavia had conquered her homesickness, for that is what Dorothy insisted the attack was. It was, however, the first--but the pain it left in Tavia's heart did not heal at once, nor did it leave the spot unscarred.

Mrs. White had prudently left the girls to themselves, but now, by some strange intuition she felt the "storm" was over, and sent a maid to ask Dorothy if some crackers or an ice would not taste good. In replying the girls discovered they were not the only ones up late, and presently the entire party had assembled in the beautiful chintz dining room, and the ices were being served between good-natured "jollyings."

"That hair cut went to your head," Ned told Tavia, "but wait until I go down for the tresses, I'll scare Mike stiff--make him believe we thought he had 'cribbed' them."

Tavia was entirely herself now, and had word for word with the jolly boys.

Mrs. White studied her closely, but of course, unobserved. She was a

fine girl, no doubt of it, and a pleasant companion for Dorothy. Her humor was as pure as the bubbles in the brook, and just as unflinching. And what a pretty girl she was! Those hazel eyes and that bronze head. No wonder even the foreign barber had noted that it was "scarce."

"A veritable wildflower," concluded the hostess, just as others had said; Major Dale for instance.

Dorothy was of an entirely different type. Her beauty was the sort that grows more and more attractive, as character develops, not depending upon mere facial outline.

"Now, children, off to bed with you," said Mrs. White, touching the bell to tell the maid the late lunch was over, "and to-morrow you know we go to camp. You will not have a headache, Tavia?"

"I have never had one in my life," answered Tavia, in that polite tone she always used in speaking to the hostess. "Perhaps my head does not know enough to ache."

"Blissful ignorance then," replied Mrs. White, "see to it that you never become so worldly-wise as to learn how. A head that does not ache is a joy forever."

Hasty good nights were exchanged, and this time there was no "waking night-mare" for Tavia. She wanted to sleep--young hearts may ache once in a while, but they have a comfortable habit of deferring to tired nature at least once in twenty-four hours.

So the Cedars rustled to their hearts' content, and the pines whispered derisively at their attempt to make themselves heard in the world of music makers--poor little stunted cedars! So small beside the giant pines, so useless in a tree's great province--to give shade; but that file of trees, scarcely taller than a hedge, had for years and years made the division between one land and another, so they stood for that at least. As Nat had explained to Tavia "they knew where to draw the line."

The morning that followed was one of those beautiful streaks of Nature's capriciousness when she allows spring to turn back and give orders to summer. It was late in June, yet the air was soft and balmy, and the sunshine behaved so nicely that Tavia, looking out of her window actually found dew on the honeysuckle, and saw there was no need to close blinds at even ten o'clock--which was late for dew certainly, and late for a girl like Tavia Travers to get her first romp out of doors.

Dorothy looked in mischievously.

"We didn't call you," she said smiling, "because you were so anxious about your cheeks, you know. Let me see. I do declare, Tavia Travers, is that a blush? Or did you dream you were Rosabel? Now don't try to tell me that's perfectly natural. It isn't--it's simply divine," and she gave her friend a reassuring kiss.

"When we get to talking such nonsense," said Tavia with as much severity as she could summon on short notice, "I think we should do something for it--get busy at something you know. It is plainly the result of downright idleness."

"Dr. Gray's prescription, you know. But now for camp. The boys have gone on ahead, and Aunt Winnie is going to stop at the hotel for lunch, She said she thought we would enjoy it."

"Oh, I will, I am sure," answered Tavia, promptly. "That's what worries me, I am getting to enjoy everything. What in the world will I do when I get back to Dalton?"

"Write letters to Nat, I suppose. Now don't get any deeper shade of red, dear. The one that you woke up with is so becoming."

"How much time have we?" asked Tavia, bestowing more care on the brushing of her short hair now than she had ever thought of giving the mass that the barber still had in his keeping.

"Perhaps an hour, but we want to get out on the lawn, for a game of ball before we start. I am just dying to play real ball! I do miss Joe and Roger so!"

"I am sure they miss you, too, Doro. I have been wondering how you have managed to keep away from them."

"Well, I have to you know. Besides I get a letter every day. Joe said yesterday that your folks had taken the Baldwin house."

"Father said in his letter he expected to. But do you know, Doro, I would never advise a poor girl to go out of her own territory, I think I shall be unhappy now--at home."

"Nonsense. You will enjoy the simple life more thoroughly than ever. That is only a scruple, you are afraid you shouldn't enjoy anything but Dalton. You know perfectly well you would rather dig Jacks-in-the-pulpit out by our back wall, than snatch those honeysuckles at your window."

"Perhaps," said Tavia vaguely. "But I guess you are right, Doro. You always are. I am just afraid to think of anything but what we've got."

"Not even the five hundred?"

"Oh, that is what upsets me. I shall expect it to make us millionaires."

"And so it will in happiness. I can't blame you one bit for wanting to get home to talk it over."

"Oh, that was yesterday. To-day I want to go to camp."

Dorothy looked at her uneasily. She remembered it was told her once that

sudden changes were always unwholesome to young people.

"It must be that," she told herself, "Tavia has had too many sudden changes lately. And she always was so sentimental. I believe, after all, it is best for girls to keep busy at practical things. Tavia has never been trained."

"Now," said Tavia, who had been fixing before the pretty dressing table, "I'm ready. But I have a plan--to help Nat out with Rosabel's complexion test."

"Oh, he was only joking," exclaimed Dorothy. "He wouldn't be so rude."

"It's no harm, I'm sure; I've done it lots of times. Come out and I'll show you."

Out on the lawn Tavia ran about like the girl she used to be. She was looking for something. Down behind the hedge of Cedars then out on the open fields patches of clover and daisies were tangled--they grew outside the Cedars; beyond the line.

"Here it is!" she called to Dorothy. "Such a lovely bunch."

Then running back she brought to Dorothy a long stem of mullen leaves.

"What are they for?" asked Dorothy, for she knew the common plant well enough.

"To paint our cheeks with, and it doesn't come off! Won't Rosabel be surprised."

"But I wouldn't think of putting those sticky leaves to my face," objected Dorothy.

"Why, they're not poison," said Tavia, beginning to unfold the velvet leaves that look so soft and are really so very "scratchy."

"Don't!" begged Dorothy. "It is just as bad as paint, and paint is positively vulgar. I am sure you were mistaken about Rosabel. No respectable girl would be so foolish."

But Tavia was rubbing the leaves to her pink cheeks with absolute disregard of everything but "rubbing." That seemed to be the one thing necessary in the operation.

Presently a deep red stained her cheeks. She felt the sting but wanted to make sure it was all rubbed on.

"Does it burn?" asked Dorothy in surprise that Tavia should really carry out her threat to make her cheeks redder than Rosabel's.

"A little," admitted Tavia. "Don't you want to try it?"

"Not for worlds," answered Dorothy. "Since you say it will not wash off how are you going to explain it?"

"Sunburn," promptly answered the other, with a subtlety surprising to Dorothy.

"You really must not help the boys play any joke on Miss Glen," said Dorothy. "You know they are Aunt Winnie's neighbors, and we are her guests."

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it," said Tavia a little stiffly, "perhaps, Dorothy, I had better have a headache and not go out to camp--I don't mean to be pouty," she hurried on, "but really, Dorothy, I have never been able to withstand that sort of temptation and I might embarrass you. I wouldn't do it for anything, Doro."

Dorothy Dale was perplexed. First Tavia had said sunburn instead of mullen leaves, and now she was willing to substitute headache for rudeness. Wasn't she learning a trifle too fast? Aunt Winnie never advocated that sort of thing--the rich may be just as honest as the poor, and more so, for they have opportunities of discerning the great difference between a gentle and polite way of saving persons' feelings and the rude unpardonable way of seeking refuge behind little quibbles at the expense of truth.

"We were only joking, of course," said Dorothy finally, jumping up from her seat on the old tree stump, "But it is different where some one else is concerned. Everybody is not willing to take a joke you know."

"I've noticed that lately," replied Tavia, pressing both hands to her cheeks to stop, if possible, the burning of the mullen leaves. "But you know I once promised to show you how I looked painted. Now I've kept my promise."

The flaming red of her cheeks seemed to make her eyes blaze as well, and it could not be denied she looked wonderfully pretty--or would look so at longer range, through opera glasses, perhaps. But in calm daylight there was something strange about her face. The short bronze hair, the dancing hazel eyes,--"

"Tavia," exclaimed Dorothy, dismay in her voice, "I am so sorry--you look like--an actress."

CHAPTER XXV

AN EMERGENCY CASE

"There's a special messenger," exclaimed Dorothy, with a little flutter. "I hope there's nothing the matter--"

The boy with the bag strapped over his shoulder had dismounted from his muddy bicycle, and was now at the door of the Cedar mansion.

Tavia slipped through the hedge after Dorothy. It seemed the message must be from Dalton, somehow, and she too, like Dorothy, felt a trifle agitated.

The maid had answered the ring, and now the boy was wandering along the path, content that his time-mark allowed a few moments for such recreation.

Mrs. White appeared on the piazza presently. Dorothy and Tavia were within its portals, waiting to be summoned.

"My dear," began the hostess, "I have just received a message from Major Dale. He wants you to come home--at once. He is called to Rochester on important business, and as he says Mrs. Martin is not well, so he cannot leave without having his little housekeeper in charge of things-- Dorothy, you are a real Dale, able at your age to keep house."

"Aunt Libby sick," was Dorothy's first thought and exclamation.

"The Rochester case," declared Tavia. "That means the Burlock mystery is going to be cleared up."

"The major did not, of course, hint at the nature of his business, but I am really so sorry to lose you just now. And the boys at camp--they will be painfully disappointed," said Mrs. White.

"We have had a perfectly splendid time," declared Dorothy, "and I am sure we can hardly thank you for your--attention. You have so many calls upon your time and you did all that shopping for us."

"My dear," and the aunt tilted Dorothy's chin to kiss it, "that was a real dissipation. To shop for my own girls. Why, it made me feel like a youngster, myself. And besides, I had orders from Dalton."

"Even so," insisted Dorothy, showing some surprise at the word "orders." "It took a lot of time and it was such a warm day. But you did a great deal more than that for us, Aunt Winnie, you must remember how much I can do, too, and give me a chance some day, when you want a rest."

"Bless the baby's heart! Hear her talk!" and the woman in the soft gray robe threw her arms about Dorothy. "All the same, when my heart gets unconquerably lonely for my daughter, I shall command her to come to me."

Tavia was "standing afar off." Her burning cheeks grew more scarlet every moment, and were plainly a matter of great embarrassment to her. She did want to offer her thanks with those of Dorothy, but somehow, her words were scorched when they reached her lips, and they "stuck there."

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. White, presently noticing Tavia's confusion.

"Have you been in poison ivy? Your cheeks show a poison!"

"Only mullen leaves," answered Tavia promptly, relieved to have made the confession without further parleying.

"Mullen leaves," in a surprised voice, then adding quickly, "Oh, of course, we all used to do that. You were painting to go out to camp," said Mrs. White.

"Tavia was going to help play a joke on Rosabel," interrupted Dorothy, anxious to make the matter as light as possible, and help Tavia with her honesty.

"Why, that would be too bad," said Mrs. White, "Poor Rosabel has trouble with her skin. It is always flaming red, and it seems almost impossible to cool down the sudden flashes. It is caused by a nervous condition."

Tavia dropped her eyes. What if Dorothy had not spoken against the joke, and if they had really gone to camp?

"Your train leaves shortly after lunch," continued Mrs. White, "so you had better be getting ready. I am sorry the boys are not here to see you off, but I will drive you over myself and see that you are safely en route for Dalton. I almost wish I were going myself. It seems an age since I have seen the dear major."

"Oh, do come!" exclaimed Dorothy joyously, "Wouldn't it be splendid."

"If I only could, my dear, but I cannot this time. I will surprise you some day. Then I will see whether you or Tavia is the better housekeeper."

"Please do not surprise me," begged Tavia, "although I should be so very glad to see you--give me notice, so that you may be able to get in. Whenever I take to sweeping and bar up the doors with furniture my Sunday school teacher calls."

"I always was considered a good player at hopscotch," joked Mrs. White, "so you need not worry about that, Tavia, dear."

The dress suit cases were to be packed. They had been full enough coming, but it was soon found impossible to get all the new things in them for the journey back. Tavia discovered this first, and called it in to Dorothy's room.

"I can't get my things in either," answered Dorothy back, through the summer draperies that divided the apartments. "We will have to send a box."

This seemed a real luxury to the girls--to come home with an express box.

Mrs. White had given Dorothy a fine bracelet as a good-bye present, and to Tavia a small gold heart and dainty gold chain.

Tavia could not speak she was so surprised and pleased at first. Dorothy had a locket and chain, but Tavia had hardly ever expected to own such a costly trinket. The maid had brought the gifts up. Mrs. White was busy dressing.

"I'll have to hug her," declared Tavia, kissing the heart set with a garnet.

"Just do," agreed Dorothy, "she would be so pleased."

Down the stairs flew Tavia. Lightly she touched the mahogany paneled door at Mrs. White's boudoir.

"Come," answered the pleasant voice.

"I came to thank you," faltered Tavia, glancing with misgivings at the handsome bared arms and throat before the gilt framed mirror.

"For your heart?" and Mrs. White smiled so kindly.

"Yes," said Tavia simply, and the next moment she had both arms around that beautiful neck.

The woman held the girl to her breast for a moment. Tavia's heart was beating wildly.

"My dear," said Mrs. White, "I do hope you have enjoyed yourself," and she kissed her again. "But you must promise me not to paint with mullen leaves any more. Sometimes such jokes lead to habits--one looks pale you know when the blaze dies away."

Tavia felt as if her blaze never would die away. Why had she been so foolish? She would have given anything now to rub those horrid, prickly leaves off forever.

"I never will paint--" she stammered.

"I hope you will not, dear, you should be grateful for such coloring as you have. But let me warn you in all kindness. It is usually pretty girls who make such mistakes--they want to be more and more attractive and so spoil it all. Think right, and of pleasant things, and the glory of happiness will be all the cosmetic you will ever need," and again she pressed her own white cheek to the burning face of the girl she still held in her arms.

Later, when Tavia was thinking it all over, she pondered seriously upon those words. No one had ever spoken to her just that way before--at home it was taken for granted she knew so much more than those around her, that such counsel as she needed was withheld. Alas, how many girls lose valuable advice by appearing to be over-smart for their years! And then

the awakening is always doubly sad. So it was with this mistake of Tavia's, trivial enough, yet for her--it appeared like a crime to have put those mullen leaves to her cheeks; to be thought vain; to have Mrs. White warn her about other girls!

It seemed a very short time indeed, from the arrival of the special message at the Cedars until the train was speeding back toward Dalton. And the journey had lost all its novelty, for Dorothy and Tavia were so intent upon the possible happenings when they should reach home, that the wait, even on a flying train, seemed tiresome.

"Do you suppose," ventured Tavia, as she laid her book down, after a number of unsuccessful efforts to become interested in the story, "they have captured that Anderson?"

"I am sure I cannot guess," answered Dorothy, "but I feel certain it is about that affair that we are called home in such a hurry. I wish I could soon keep the promise I made to poor Mr. Burlock. I said I would some day find his daughter Nellie, and it does seem the detectives have been a long time in finding any tangible clew. Father hired two of the best he could get to trace the child--that was her mother who died, the one you told me of, you know. I did not talk about it because father thought it was best to say nothing that might possibly give Anderson a hint that they were on his track."

"And have they tracked him?" asked Tavia.

"Yes, they know he left Mr. Burlock in Rochester. He cashed a check there that Mr. Burlock gave him for what the poor man thought would be a possible clew to little Nellie's whereabouts, and to think that the disappointment killed the disheartened father!"

"Well, I only hope they have him now," said Tavia, "I would like to have another chance at his--hat."

Then the conversation drifted back to North Birchland. Both girls looked much benefited by their visit, and even Tavia's short hair and unnatural red cheeks did not detract from the noticeable improvement. Dorothy's face had rounded some too, and the Lake air had given a ruddiness to her naturally delicate tinting, that was most becoming to her as a summer girl.

"I never saw such nice boys," remarked Tavia, "I think, after all, it takes money to polish people."

"Not at all," insisted Dorothy. "It is not money but good breeding. There are plenty of poor persons who are just as polished as you call it. Father often told us about a family he visited when he was abroad. They were so poor in clothes--pathetically shabby, and yet they went in the very best society. Father used to make us laugh by his funny descriptions of the ladies at dinners. At the same affairs would be Thomas Carlyle, and just think, these poor people--he was a parson, lived on the very ground that was once part of the garden of Sir Thomas

Moore. Father saw the famous mulberry trees there, that so much has been written about. I hope I may be able to go there some time--we have relatives in England."

"I would not care to travel," said Tavia impatiently. "This seems a long enough trip for me."

"Only two more stops," said Dorothy as the train rattled past the stations. "Oh, I shall be so glad to see them all."

"And lonesome for the Cedars after you have seen them all," Tavia hinted. "That's the worst of it, home is always with us--"

"Get your hat box down," Dorothy interrupted. "We are slackening up now."

"Dalton! Dalton!" called the brakeman at the door, and the next minute the girls were being kissed heartily by Joe, Roger and Johnnie, "the committee on arrival," as Tavia said. The lads were fully qualified to carry off the honors in the way of boxes and small bundles.

"How is Aunt Libby?" asked Dorothy as soon as she could say anything relevant.

"Better," said Joe, "but father does not feel well--you are not to worry--" seeing how her face clouded, "he is only tired out. He has been working at the office and writing so many letters--"

"That I should have written. Poor dear father! I hope he is not going to have another spell," and Dorothy sighed.

"No, the doctor said he would be all right if he would only stay quiet, but he is about as quiet as my squirrel in its new cage," said Joe.

"Home again," called Dorothy, waving her hand to the major who now appeared on the piazza. "Here we are, bag and baggage," and then it seemed all the "pain of separation" was made up for in that loving embrace--the major had the Little Captain in his arms again.

CHAPTER XXVI

DOROTHY'S COURAGE

"Dorothy," said the major, when all the news from Aunt Winnie's had been told and retold to Joe and Roger, "I want you to come to my study after tea. I have something to say to you."

The major was seated in his favorite chair at the open window. Dorothy thought he looked handsomer every day, as his hair became whiter, and

now as she came to him for the business talk, she wondered who in all the world could have so loving and so noble a father.

"I had expected to go to Rochester in the morning," he began, as Dorothy dropped to the stool at his feet, "but that dear old meddling doctor says no. I feel well enough--"

"But you are not, daddy dear," interrupted Dorothy. "You have been working too hard, I should not have left you."

"Tut, tut, child, it is you who have been working too hard. I did not realize it until I picked up the loose ends. But we must not play pot and kettle. We must talk business."

Major Dale went across the room and opened his desk. The letter he wanted was at his hand and he glanced at it hurriedly.

"Yes, it is to-morrow morning," he said. "I was to appear in court to identify Anderson."

"They have him then?" Dorothy could not refrain from asking.

"Yes, your man--Squire Travers--refunded him up, so you see he has returned your compliment, he has captured your enemy."

"But how could you identify Anderson? You have never seen him."

"Yes, I had that pleasure once. I saw him with Burlock and I could identify him. Travers did some fine work on the case, walked right over the detectives, and he deserves credit. He will get it too, in the way of a second term as squire, for he has completely broken up the factions--it seems like one party now."

"I am so glad," said Dorothy. "They did have such a hard time of it."

"Yes, but about to-morrow. Do you think Ralph could identify Anderson? Ralph is out of town and I have wired him to be back to-night."

"I don't think he ever saw the man," Dorothy answered thoughtfully. "But I saw him very distinctly. Wouldn't I do?"

"You? Why, child, could you go into a big police court and say: 'There, that's the man;' without fainting from fright?"

"Indeed, I could," declared the girl. "I could do more than that to find Nellie Burlock."

"If I really thought so--"

"But you must know it," said Dorothy, quick to take advantage of the major's hesitation. "If you just give me instructions I will carry them out to the letter. And oh! if we can only give that money to its rightful owner at last."

"Yes, if we only could, I think I would feel like a new man. It has weighed heavily upon me, particularly since that rascal attacked you at the falls."

"I have it!" and Dorothy's eyes flashed in unison with her brain. "Telegraph to Mr. Travers to meet us, and let Tavia and me go. Tavia has an aunt in Rochester, you know, and she will take care of us when we have finished with the other business. Indeed, I can hardly wait."

"I cannot seem to think that you should go," objected the major. "It is a big city, and suppose Travers should fail to meet you?"

"Then I'll meet him," promptly answered Dorothy. "Just give me all the directions and I will find any police station in Rochester. Besides, I'll have Tavia, and she has been there--through the city--often."

"Well, it does seem the only way, for if we fail to identify Anderson he may be released, and I fancy he would never walk into our hands again."

"Now, not another thought, but how we are to go?" and Dorothy drew her chair up to his desk. "Tell me all about it now, so I can have it all settled in my mind to-night. Then to-morrow, all we will have to do is depart. My! we are becoming famous travelers!"

Very late that night Major Dale still sat at his desk. It was a serious matter for him to allow his only daughter to go into a strange city and then to a police court to identify a criminal. But how else could he carry out his sacred obligation to Burlock? How else could he fulfill his duty to the lost child?

And Dorothy too, was troubled that night. Would she really have courage to undertake the trip to a big city and then--?

But she, too, had made a promise, and she, too, felt the voice of the dead father and the voice of the neglected child crying for justice.

Dorothy Dale did not hesitate--she would go.

Next morning Tavia bounced around like a toy balloon. To think of going to Rochester, and into a police court--what could be more delightfully sensational? And perhaps they would have their names in the papers, their pictures, she ventured to suggest. "The two girls from Dalton!" "A striking scene in the police court!" These and other "striking things" she outlined to serious Dorothy, who now in the early morning sat so close to the car window, and seemed to hear nothing of the foolish prattle, as the train rattled on.

"Don't be a funeral, Doro," objected Tavia. "It's the best fun I ever dreamed of. Wait till they call on me to testify! Ahem! Won't I make a stir!"

"But we are not going to testify at all--"

"Same thing. We are to go before a lot of handsome officers, and they will be so careful of our feelings, of course. I hope I blush! It's always so nice to blush in print!"

Whether her nonsense was all frivolity, or somewhat calculated to distract the over serious Dorothy, would have taken an expert in human nature to decide, and there were many other things about Tavia quite as bewildering; but Dorothy was patient, she knew Tavia would not disappoint her when the test came.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LITTLE CAPTAIN--CONCLUSION

"Wasn't it mean," grumbled Tavia, "I thought it would be so dramatic."

"Dramatic enough for me," answered Dorothy. "I felt a chill steal all over me when I put my hand on that man's arm, and said, 'This is he!' Ugh, I have the rub of his sleeve still on my palm," and Dorothy tried to efface the memory of it on her small white hand by rubbing it briskly on her linen skirt.

"Well, I am disappointed," pouted Tavia, "and I don't want any more mock trials."

"We must hurry, your father will soon be here. And how anxious I am to go to that place. What if the man has deceived the police as he did poor Mr. Burlock?"

"No danger. He is caught in his own trap now, and his only hope is from good behavior--they make it lighter for him as he makes it easier to clear up the case. I heard pop talking to the folks last night about it."

This was the day after the identification of Andrew Anderson by Dorothy in the Police Court. The man had disguised his appearance by taking off his beard, but there were other marks, and the girl could not be shaken in her positive identification.

The man had denied his guilt at first, but finally broke down when confronted with the evidence against him and admitted he had the Burlock child in hiding, but she was now in charge of some woman. Dorothy was to go for her to-day.

Mr. Travers, though having many important affairs to attend to, was on time, and he agreed to take Dorothy and Tavia with him to find Nellie.

"Keep close to me," he told the girls, making their way through dirty

and uncertain streets. "This is a rough part of town."

House after house he stopped at, leaving the girls in each instance waiting anxiously to be told to follow. But the places were so much alike in their squalor the search was becoming more and more tiresome.

"Maybe he gave the wrong address," ventured Tavia, discouraged and dissatisfied with the many mistakes.

"No, but these people change homes so often," explained her father.
"Here, this looks--wait a minute!"

Down the steps of a dark basement Squire Travers hurried. The girls looked after him--that place was not dirty, merely poor and bare.

Presently he called to them:

"Come in, girls," and Dorothy felt she could hardly move--she was so anxious and expectant.

A woman, with a kind face, greeted them sadly, but with that unmistakable air of one whom poverty cannot drag down from self-respect.

"Yes, I have a child with me," she answered nervously, "but I cannot allow you to see her."

Then Squire Travers produced his credentials.

"You need not fear us," he told her kindly. "We have the best of news for little Nellie Burlock, and we are only too anxious to make her acquainted with it."

"But we have been disappointed so often," objected the woman, "and that man Anderson--"

"You need not think of him now," said Squire Travers. "We have just left him in the hands of the sheriff. This little girl," placing his hand on Dorothy, "has brought it all about. She showed the child's father how to die happily--made it possible for him to see the hope beyond, and then she and her good father have worked untiringly to find the child. Cannot we see her now?"

[Illustration: Instantly Dorothy had her arms around the little girl]

The woman took Dorothy's hands, and looked straight into her eyes. Then, without a word, she turned and opened a narrow door, that seemed to run under a stairway.

"Nellie!" she called softly.

Dorothy's heart felt as if a life was dependent upon those few moments. What if it should not be the right one?

A child--pale and wan, but with an inexpressibly sweet face--stood before them. She clung to the woman like a frightened little bird.

"They have good news for us, Nellie," said the woman. "This child is Nellie Burlock, only child of Miles Burlock."

Instantly Dorothy had her arms around the little girl.

"To think we have really found you," she tried to say, but the words choked for very joy in her throat.

"Have you any papers?" asked Squire Travers of the woman.

"Yes," she answered, "and more than papers. I took that child from her dying mother's arms, and no threats nor promises of that villain Anderson have taken her from me. She is all I have now--my own darling has been spared the hardships we have to suffer."

"But we will not take her from you," said Squire Travers. "I know something of your affairs. Your husband is a printer out of work? His name is Mooney?"

"Yes," answered the woman sadly.

"Then how long will it take you to get ready to leave for Dalton? Yourself, Nellie and Mr. Mooney?"

"Leave?" gasped the woman, "we have until to-morrow morning to get out of this place--"

"Very well," replied the squire, "then you can come with us promptly, for Major Dale will not rest until we get back. Here, you two Dalton girls, don't smother that child. Save a kiss or two for those at home. They will want to know Nellie, too," and Dorothy looked from the little stranger's face to smile at the jolly squire.

When the next afternoon train from the west pulled into Dalton there alighted from it a party that attracted the attention of all who chanced to be about the depot. The little blue-eyed girl, Nellie Burlock, was very pale, but "wonderfully pretty" Tavia declared. Mrs. Mooney had also that frightened, tired look, but her husband seemed to have left all Rochester behind him. He was a first-class printer and was to work on Major Dale's paper, and was not that a bright prospect for an ambitious man?

Dorothy brought Nellie in alone to the major, He raised his head to kiss his daughter, then he kissed the fatherless one--a new light came into his eyes.

"Dorothy," he murmured. "My own Little Captain! You have led us all to victory! God bless you!"

Of course there were a hundred and one explanations to make, and many

stories to tell besides. Nellie Burlock told of her life with Mrs. Mooney, and of how she and the woman had been threatened more than once by Andrew Anderson. To Mr. Mooney the affair was nothing but a mystery and he had not bothered his head much about it.

"The authorities will take care of Anderson," said the major, and told the truth, for the rascal was sent to prison for a term of years. Then Major Dale was regularly appointed as little Nellie's guardian, although the girl continued to reside with Mrs. Mooney. But she often came to see Dorothy, and to see Tavia, too.

"It has all turned out for the best," said Dorothy, one day, to Tavia.

"I wonder if anything so wonderful will ever happen to us again," remarked her friend.

"I doubt it," answered Dorothy; yet she was mistaken; something wonderful did happen, although of an entirely different nature. What it was we shall discover in another story about her, to be called, "Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School."

Schooldays at Dalton were rapidly drawing to a close now. Both Dorothy and Tavia applied themselves diligently, and, wonder of wonders, both passed!

"I can't believe it!" cried Tavia, and she began to dance around the room. "Isn't it sublime!" And then she caught Dorothy and made her dance too.

"It certainly is grand," answered Dorothy. "Oh, I am so happy!" and then she kissed her girl friend; and here let us say good-bye.

The End

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