

The Campfire Girls Go Motoring

Hildegard G. Frey

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[Illustration: "YES, I AM RUNNING AWAY," SAID THE GIRL IN A TONE OF DESPERATION.]

The Camp Fire Girls Go Motoring

OR

Along the Road that Leads the Way

By HILDEGARD G. FREY

AUTHOR OF

"The Camp Fire Girls in the Maine Woods," "The Camp Fire Girls at School," "The Camp Fire Girls at Onoway House."

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS GO MOTORING

CHAPTER I.

It is at Nyoda's bidding that I am writing the story of our automobile trip last September. She declared it was really too good to keep to ourselves, and as I was official reporter of the Winnebagos anyway, it was no more nor less than my solemn duty. Sahwah says that the only thing which was lacking about our adventures was that we didn't have a ride in a patrol wagon, but then Sahwah always did incline to the spectacular. And the whole train of events hinged on a commonplace circumstance which is in itself hardly worth recording; namely, that tan khaki was all the rage for outing suits last summer. But then, many an empire has fallen for a still slighter cause.

The night after we came home from Onoway House and shortly before we started on that never-to-be-forgotten trip, I was sitting at the window watching the evening stars come out one after another. That line of Longfellow's came into my mind:

"Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels."

That quotation set me to thinking about Evangeline and the tragedy of her never finding her lover. Could it be possible, I thought, that two people could come so near to finding each other and yet be just too late? Not in these days of long distance telephones, I said to myself. As I looked out dreamily into the mild September twilight, I idly watched two little girls chasing each other around the voting booth that stood on the corner. They kept dodging around the four sides,

playing cat and mouse, and trying to catch each other by means of every trick they could think of. One would go a little way and then stop and listen for the footsteps of the other; then she would double back and go the other way, and thus they kept it up, never coming face to face. I stopped dreaming and gave them my entire attention; I was beginning to feel a thrill of suspense as to which one would finally outwit the other and overtake her. The darkness deepened; more stars came out; the moon rose; still the exciting game did not come to a finish. Finally, a woman came out on the porch of the house on the corner and called, "Emma! Mary! Come in now." They never caught each other.

When I was elected reporter on the trip to keep a record of the interesting things we saw, so we wouldn't forget them when we came to write the Count, Nyoda said jokingly, "You'd better take an extra notebook along, Migwan, for we might possibly have some adventures on the road."

I answered, "We've had all the adventures this last summer that can possibly fall to the lot of one set of human beings, and I suppose all the rest of our lives will seem dull and uninteresting by comparison."

I presume Fate heard that remark of mine just as she did that other one last summer when I observed to Hinpoha that we were going to have such a quiet time at Onoway House, and sat up and chuckled on the knees of the gods. In the light of future events it seems to me that it couldn't have done less than kick its heels against that Knee and have hysterics.

As I was in the Glow-worm all the time, of course, I was an eye witness to the things which happened to our party only; but the other girls have told their tale so many times that it seems as if I had actually experienced their adventures myself, and so will write everything down as if I had seen it, without stopping to say Gladys said this or Hinpoha told me that. It makes a better story so, Nyoda says.

After Gladys's father had told us we might take the two automobiles and go on a trip by ourselves, he gave us a road map and told us to go anywhere we liked within a radius of five hundred miles and he would pay all the bills, provided, we planned and carried out the whole trip by ourselves, and did not keep telegraphing home for advice unless we got into serious trouble. All such little troubles as breakdowns, hotels and traffic rules we were to manage by ourselves. He has a theory that Gladys should learn to be self-reliant and means to give her every opportunity to develop resourcefulness. He thinks she has improved wonderfully since joining the Winnebagos and considered this motor trip a good way of testing how much she can do for herself. Gladys scoffed at the idea of wiring home for help when Nyoda was along, for Nyoda has toured a great deal and once drove her uncle's car home from Los Angeles when he broke his arm. Gladys's father knew full well that Nyoda was perfectly capable of engineering the trip or he never would have proposed it in the first place, but he never can resist the temptation to tease Gladys, and kept on inquiring anxiously if she knew which side of the road to stop on and where to go to buy gas. Gladys, who had driven her own car for three years! Finally, he offered to bet that we would be wiring home for advice before the end of the trip and Gladys took him up on it. The outcome was that if we returned safe and sound without calling for help Mr. Evans would build us a permanent Lodge in which to hold our Winnebago meetings. Gladys danced a whole figure dance for joy, for in her mind the Lodge was as

good as built.

How we did pore over that road map, trying to make up our minds where to go! Nyoda wanted to go to Cincinnati and Gladys wanted to go to Chicago, and the arguments each one put up for her cause were side-splitting. Finally, they decided to settle it by a set of tennis. They played all afternoon and couldn't get a set. We finally intervened and dragged them from the court in the name of humanity, for the sun was scorching and we were afraid they would be doing the Sun Dance as Ophelia did if we didn't rescue them. The score was then 44-44 in games. So now that neither side had the advantage of the other we did as we did the time we named the raft at Onoway House--joined forces. We decided to go both to Cincinnati and Chicago.

As we finally made it out, the route was like this: Cleveland to Chicago by way of Toledo and Ft. Wayne; Chicago to Indianapolis; Indianapolis to Louisville. Here Hinpoha got a look at the map and wanted to know if we couldn't take in Vincennes, because she had been crazy to see the place since reading Alice of Old Vincennes. So to humor her we included Vincennes on the road to Louisville, although it was quite a bit out of the way. Then from Louisville we planned to go up to Cincinnati and see the Rookwood Pottery that Nyoda is so crazy about and come back home through Dayton, Springfield and Columbus. We were all very well pleased with ourselves when we had the route mapped out at last, and none of us were sorry that Nyoda and Gladys couldn't agree on Cincinnati or Chicago and had to compromise and take in both.

Then, when it was decided where we were going, came the no less important question of what we were to wear on the road. We decided on our khaki-colored hiking-suits as the shade that would show the dust the least, and our soft tan regulation Camp Fire hats, with green motor veils. Besides being eminently sensible the combination was wonderfully pretty, as even critical Hinpoha, who, at first wanted us to wear smart white and blue suits, had to admit. It seemed to me the most fitting thing in the world for a group of Camp Fire Girls to sally forth dressed in wood brown and green, the colors of nature which in my mind should be the chosen colors of the whole organization.

We had a discussion about goggles and Gladys and Hinpoha declared flatly that they wouldn't disfigure their faces with them, but Nyoda made us all get them whether we wanted to wear them all the time or not. Nyoda is an advocate of Preparedness. It was this spirit that prompted her to make me take an extra note-book along, not the premonition that there was going to be something to put into it. Nyoda doesn't believe in premonitions since she didn't have any the time she and Gladys got into the blue automobile with the cane streamer that awful day in May.

Then there came the weighty matter of the names of the two cars. I will skip the discussion and merely announce the result. The big, brown car which Gladys was to drive was christened the Striped Beetle, on account of the black and gold stripes, and the black car was called the Glow-worm, because that's what it reminds you of when it comes down the road at night with the lamps lighted and the body invisible in the darkness. Nyoda was to be at the helm, or rather at the wheel, of the Glow-worm.

In order that no feelings might be involved in any way over which car we other girls traveled in, Nyoda, Solomon-like, proposed that she and Gladys play "John Kempo" for us. (That isn't spelled right, but no

matter.) Gladys won Hinpoha, Chapa and Medmangi, and Nyoda won Sahwah, Nakwisi and myself. Thus the die was cast and my fortunes linked with those of the Glow-worm.

I don't remember ever being so supremely happy as I was the night before we were to start. All my troubles seemed over for good. The summer venture had been a success and the doors of college stood wide open to receive me when the time came. The awful weight of poverty which had sat on my shoulders last year, and had made my school days more of a nightmare than anything else was lifted, and here was I, "Migwan, the Penpusher", actually about to start out on an automobile trip such as I had often heard described by more fortunate friends, but had never hoped to experience myself. We were all over at Hinpoha's house that night, because Aunt Phoebe had just come back with the Doctor and they wanted to see us.

"And you be careful of your bones, Missis Sahwah!" said the Doctor, playfully shaking his finger at her.

"Are you going if it rains?" asked Aunt Phoebe.

The possibility of rain had never occurred to us, as the only picture we had seen in our mind's eye had been country roads gleaming in the sunshine, but Gladys said scornfully that she would like to be shown the group of Camp Fire Girls who would let themselves be put off by rain.

"Let's build a Rain Jinx," said Sahwah, who always has the most whimsical inspirations.

"A what?" asked Gladys.

"A Rain Jinx," said Sahwah, warming to the idea. "A 'doings' to scare away the Rain Bird and the Thunder Bird."

As the foundation for her Rain Jinx she took Hinpoha's Latin book, which she declared was the driest thing in existence. On top of that she piled other books which were nearly as dry until she had a sort of altar. Then she proceeded to sacrifice all the rubbers, rain-coats and umbrellas she could find, as a propitiatory offering to the Rain Bird. Thoroughly in the mood for such nonsense, now she proceeded to chant weird chants around the altar to protect us from all sorts of things on the road; to soften the hearts of traffic policemen; to keep the tires from bursting, and the machinery from cutting up capers. It was the most ridiculous performance I have ever seen and Aunt Phoebe and the Doctor laughed themselves almost sick over it. I laughed so myself that I could not take notes on what she was saying and so can't let you laugh at it for yourselves. As a reporter I'm afraid I'm not an unqualified success.

In the midst of that "Vestal Virgin" business--Sahwah was flourishing a chamois vest to give us the idea of _vestal_--Nyoda walked in. There was only one low lamp burning in order to carry out Sahwah's idea of what a Rain Jinx ceremony should be like, and Nyoda couldn't clearly make out the objects in the room.

"Look out for the Rain Jinx!" called Sahwah, warningly. "If you touch it it will bring us bad luck instead of good."

But it was too late. Nyoda had stumbled over the pile of things on the floor, and in falling sent the elements of the Rain Jinx flying in all directions. Hinpoha flew to light the light and Sahwah picked Nyoda up out of the mess and set her in a chair, while the rest of us collected the scattered articles and tidied up the room, and Sahwah painted in lurid colors to Nyoda the dire consequences of her crime, and made her give her famous "Wimmen Suffrage" speech as an act of atonement.

The Rain Bird must have forgiven her on the strength of that speech, for there never was such a perfect blue and gold day as the morning we started out. I have already told you how we were divided up in the cars. Gladys in the Striped Beetle went first, carrying with her Hinpoha, Chapa and Medmangi, and Nyoda drove the Glow-worm right behind her with Sahwah, Nakwisi and myself. Hinpoha insisted upon bringing Mr. Bob, her black cocker spaniel, along as a mascot. Of course, everybody wanted to sit beside the driver and we had to compromise by planning to change seats every hour to give us all a chance. We all carried our cameras in our hands to be ready to snap anything worth while as it came along, and beside that Nakwisi had her spy-glass along as usual and I had my reporter's note-book. In honor of my being reporter they let me sit beside Nyoda at the start.

Nakwisi couldn't wait until we got under way and bounced up and down on the seat with impatience. "What's the matter with you?" said Sahwah, "You're a regular _starting-crank_!"

"That will do, Sahwah," said Nyoda, with mock severity. "I want it distinctly understood that anybody who indulges in puns on this trip is going to get out and walk."

With that threat she settled herself behind the wheel and turned on the gasoline, or whatever it is you do to start a car. Thus we started off, like modern day Innocents Abroad, with the Winnebago banner across the back of each car, and our green veils fluttering in the breeze. Mr. Evans waved the paper on which the bet was recorded significantly, and shouted "Remember!" in a sepulchral tone, and it was plain to be seen he was sure he would win the bet. He even tempted Fate so far as to throw an old rubber after us as we departed, instead of an old shoe, to bring us luck according to the Rain Jinx. It landed in the tonneau of our car and Sahwah pounced upon it as a favorable omen and kept it for a mascot.

With a great cheering and waving of handkerchiefs we were off. The Striped Beetle was just ahead of us in all the glory of its new coat of paint and its bright banner, and I couldn't help thrilling with pride to think that I, for once, belonged to such a gay company, I, who all my life had to be content with shabby things. I suppose we must have cut quite a figure with our tan suits all alike and our green veils, for people stopped to look at us as we passed through the streets. It was not long before we were outside the city limits and running along the western road toward Toledo.

I always did think September was the prettiest month in which to go through the country in the lake region on account of the grapes. The vineyards stretched for miles along the road and the air was sweet with the perfume of the purple fruit. There were wide corn-fields, too, that made me think of the poem:

"Up from the meadows rich with corn,

Clear in the cool September morn--"

Oh, there never was such a beautiful country as America, nor such a happy girl as I! In one place someone had planted a long strip of brilliant red geraniums through the middle of a green field and the effect was too gorgeous for description. (I'm glad I noted all those things and put them down on the first part of the trip, for afterwards I scarcely thought of looking at the scenery.)

The girls in the car ahead kept shouting back at us and trying to make up a song about the Striped Beetle, and, of course, we had resurrected the one-time popular "Glow-worm" song and made the hills and dales resound with the air of the chorus:

"Shine, little Glow-worm, glimmer,
Shine, little Glow-worm, glimmer,
Lead us lest too far we wander,
Love's sweet voice is calling yonder;
Shine, little Glow-worm, glimmer,
Shine, little Glow-worm, glimmer,
Light the path, below, above,
And lead us on to love!"

Then there would come a chorus of derision from the Striped Beetles, who politely inquired which one of us expected to be led to her Prince Charming by that mechanical Glow-worm; and flung back our chorus in a parody:

"Shine, little Glow-worm, glimmer,
Till the Law makes you put on the dimmer!"

Then we christened the horn of the Striped Beetle "Love", because that was the only "sweet voice" we heard calling yonder. I don't believe I ever had such a good time as I did on the road to Toledo. We got there about noon and went to a large restaurant for dinner. Even there people looked up from their tables as we eight girls came in, dressed in our wood brown and green costumes, and we heard several low-voiced remarks, "They're probably Camp Fire Girls."

We had a great deal of fun at dinner where we all sat at one big table. Sahwah and Hinpoha sat at the two ends and got into a dispute as to which end was the head of the table. "Stop quarreling about it, you ridiculous children," said Nyoda. "'Wherever Magregor sits--' you know the rest."

While she was speaking I saw a tourist at another table, dressed in a long dust coat and wearing monstrous goggles that covered the entire upper half of his face and made him look like a frog, lean forward as if to catch every word. Nyoda is perfectly stunning in her motor suit and I couldn't blame the man for admiring her, but we did want Nyoda to ourselves on this trip, and the thought of having men mixed up in it put a damper on my spirits. I suppose Nyoda will leave us for a man sometime, but the thought always makes me ill. I came out of my little reverie to find that Gladys had appropriated my glass of water and Sahwah and Hinpoha were still disputing about being the head of the table. Finally, we jokingly advised Sahwah to ask the waiter, and she promptly took us up and did it, and found that Hinpoha was the head.

"I'm going to have the head at the next place we eat," Sahwah declared,

owning her defeat with as good grace as she could. And Fate winked solemnly and began to slide off the knees of the gods.

From Toledo to Ft. Wayne, our next stop, there were two routes, the northern one through Bryan and the southern one through Napoleon and Defiance. As there didn't seem to be much difference between them we played "John Kempo" and the northern route won, two out of three. As we were threading our way through the streets of the town, an old woman tried to cross the street just in front of the Glow-worm. Nyoda sounded the horn warningly but the noise seemed to confuse her. She got across the middle of the street in safety and Nyoda quickened up a bit, when the woman lost her head and started back for the side she had come from. She darted right in front of the Glow-worm, and although Nyoda turned aside sharply, the one fender just grazed her and she fell down in the street. Of course, a crowd collected and we had to stop and get out and help her to the sidewalk where we made sure she was not hurt. Nyoda finally took her in tow and piloted her across the street to the place where she wanted to go.

When the excitement was over and the crowd had dispersed we returned to the car and Nyoda started up once more. Then for the first time we noticed that the Striped Beetle was nowhere in sight. Apparently Gladys had not noticed our stopping in the confusion of the busy street and had gone on ahead without us.

CHAPTER II.

Gladys, as the leader, had the road map with her with the route marked out which we were to follow. We hastened to the end of the street, expecting to catch sight of the Striped Beetle just around the corner, but it was nowhere to be seen. We stopped at a store and asked if they had seen it come by and they said, yes, it had just passed and had turned to the left up --th Street. We followed swiftly, thinking to come upon the girls each moment, but there was no sign of them.

"They surely have discovered by this time that we are not behind them and must be waiting for us," said Nyoda. "I can't understand it."

"Gladys is probably trying to see if we can trail her through the city to the motor road," said Sahwah. "You know how much we talked about being self-reliant? We'll probably find her where the road branches out from the city, waiting with a stop watch to see how long it took us to find her."

"We'll get there," said Nyoda grimly, her sporting blood up.

Everywhere along the road people told us about the brown car that had gone just ahead of us and pointed out the direction it had taken. Every time we turned a corner we expected to hear the laughter of the girls who were leading us such a merry chase, but we didn't. Soon we were out of the city and on the country road once more, and we were quite a bit puzzled not to find them waiting for us. We certainly thought the joke was to have ended here. But a man walking along the road had seen the car go by half an hour before.

"Half an hour!" we echoed. "Gladys must have been speeding to have gotten so far ahead of us." Of course, the Striped Beetle is a six-cylinder car and more powerful than the Glow-worm, which is a four, and then they hadn't stopped at every corner to ask the way, so it wasn't so strange after all that Gladys was so far ahead.

"We'll make some speed on this road," said Nyoda resolutely, "and if we don't catch Lady Gladys before she gets to Ft. Wayne, I'll know the reason why. This is the road to Bryan, isn't it?" she asked, with her hand on the starting-lever.

"No," said the man. "This here road goes through Napoleon and Defiance. It gets to Ft. Wayne all right, but it doesn't go through Bryan."

Nyoda stopped in surprise. "The southern route?" she said, wonderingly. "Why, we decided on the northern. Whatever could have made Gladys change her mind without letting us know? Are you sure it was a brown car with four girls dressed just like us?"

The man was positive. It was the suits and the veils all alike that had caught his eye in the first place. He didn't generally remember much about the cars that went past. There were too many of them. But these girls looked so fine in their tan suits that he just had to look twice at them. They were laughing fit to kill and all waved their handkerchiefs at him as they passed.

We looked at each other in astonishment. It was undoubtedly the Striped Beetle that was going along the southern route and we couldn't understand it.

"Do you suppose," I said, "that Gladys could have misunderstood when you were playing 'John Kempo' and thought it was the southern route that won?"

"She must have," said Nyoda. "It's not impossible. We were all laughing and talking so much nonsense at the time that it was hard to think straight. But it doesn't make any difference," she added, "this route is as good as the northern, and we are right behind them and I mean to catch up before we get to Ft. Wayne." I knew what Nyoda was thinking about. The man had said the girls in the car were laughing fit to kill, and that looked very much as if there were some joke on foot. We knew very well they were running away from us and were going to lead us a chase to Ft. Wayne.

As we started off in pursuit I looked around from the tonneau, where I was then sitting, and saw a red roadster not far behind us. There was one man in it and he was the Frog I had seen goggling at Nyoda in the dining-room at Toledo.

We were not so terribly surprised when we did not find the Striped Beetle at Napoleon where we stopped for gasoline. We knew now that they would not let us catch them before we got to Ft. Wayne. We inquired at the service station and found that the brown car had stopped for gasoline nearly an hour before. Clearly they were not losing any time on the road. Neither were we gaining on them at that rate. Nyoda looked thoughtful as she started out once more. I knew she was meditating a lecture for Gladys when she caught up with her, about running away from us. Nyoda was responsible for the welfare of seven girls and how could she fulfil her trust if she had only three under her eye? And I knew as

well as I knew anything that Gladys would forfeit her right to be leader by that little prank and for the rest of the trip would follow meekly along behind us. Nyoda would never in the world stand for her going off like that. But by the puzzled frown on her face I knew that she didn't understand it any more than I did. Gladys was the last one in the world to do such a thing. There must be some reason.

From my seat I could see that the Frog, who had also stopped for gasoline when we did, was not far behind us. The car he was in looked like a racing car, with a very long hood in front, and he could easily have gotten ahead of us. I wondered for a long time why he did not do so, and then suddenly I had a premonition. He was following us, or rather Nyoda. Something had told me when I first saw him that we should see him again. I made a horrible face at him behind my veil and wished something would happen to his car.

As we were passing through the village of S---- a chicken started up right under our front wheels, uttering a startled and startling squawk. Nyoda swerved to one side and ran squarely into a tree. There was a bump and a grating sound somewhere beneath us and then the nice cheerful humming of the motor stopped. Nyoda got out of the car to see what had been damaged.

"As far as I can see, only the lamp bracket is bent," she said, but when she tried to start the car again it wouldn't start.

"Maybe the driving spider has caught the flywheel," said Sahwah, trying to be funny.

Just then the red roadster did pass us, going slowly, and the Frog kept his eyes riveted on Nyoda all the while. She never looked at him. She had unbuttoned the roof over the engine and was poking her fingers down into the dragon's mouth, but undoubtedly the trouble wasn't there. There was a repair shop not far away--all of the towns along the touring routes which have an eye to business have some sort of one--and Nyoda repaired thither and fetched a man who tinkered knowingly with the regions underneath the Glow-worm and then reported in a dust choked voice that one of the gears was "on the blink". Just what part of a car's vital organs a gear is I don't know, but I judged it was an important one because Nyoda looked serious.

"What will we do?" she said, tragically.

"Can fix you up in the shop," said the man, wiping his forehead with a blue and white handkerchief. "We have a dismantled car of the same make there and can take a gear out of that."

So the Glow-worm was trundled up the street into the shop, and we were told that the damage would be fixed by the next morning. The next morning! We looked at each other in consternation.

"But we must get to Ft. Wayne to-night," said Nyoda, in a tone of finality.

"Sorry, ladies," said the foreman of the repair shop, "but it can't be done." Then we realized that we would have to stay in S---- all night. Here was a pretty mess. And Gladys and Hinpoha and the other two waiting for us in Ft. Wayne.

"We'll have to let them know," said Nyoda. "They'll worry when they see we're not coming."

"Let them worry," said Sahwah, darkly. "It serves them right for what they did to us."

But, of course, we had to let them know. So Nyoda wired the little hotel where we had planned to stay--and what a good time we were going to have!--and told the girls to stay there for the night and to please wait for us in the morning and not leave us again. Of course, the message was much more condensed than that, but Nyoda got it all in.

Then there was nothing else for us to do but make the best of a bad bargain and hunt up the one hotel in S---- and prepare to spend the night. But when we got there it was crowded. There was a big wedding in town that night, we were informed, and the out-of-town guests had filled the hotel. They were already two in a room and there was no hope of doubling up. Seeing our dismay at this news, the clerk bethought himself of a woman in the village who had a very large house and often let rooms to tourists when the hotel was full. She had once been very wealthy, but had lost everything but the house and now made her living by keeping boarders.

We thanked him and hurried off to the address to which he had directed us. We were very hot and tired and dusty and amazingly hungry. It was already six o'clock in the evening, and with the difference in time between our city and this we had been on the road a long day. We were glad after all that the hotel had not been able to accommodate us when we saw this house. The hotel was on the main street and the rooms must have been small and stuffy; anything but comfortable on this hot night. But this house stood far back from the street in an immense shady yard, one of those enormous brick houses that well-to-do people were fond of building about thirty-five years ago, with large rooms and high ceilings and enough space inside them to quarter a regiment. We blessed the good fortune which had led our feet to this hospitable looking door, which, in times gone by, must have opened to admit throngs of distinguished people.

There was no door-bell, but a big bronze knocker, and in answer to it a young girl, presumably the "hired girl", let us into the hall. She took our coming as a matter of course, so we judged they were prepared for tourists that day, knowing that the hotel was full on account of the wedding. Without a word she led us up-stairs and we breathed a sigh of relief when we thought of a bath and supper. The house must have been the home of fashionable people in its time, for the furnishings, though old, were still luxurious. The carpet on the stairs was still thick and soft to our feet, and the curtains I could see on the windows were of a fine quality. At the head of the stairs there was an oil painting of a woman in the dress of a by-gone day. The servant opened the door of a room at the front end of the long up-stairs hall and we passed in.

We had known instinctively as soon as we entered the place that the lady of the house was a woman of refinement and culture, notwithstanding the reduced circumstances which made it necessary for her to rent out rooms in this big mansion of a house in order to make her living. "I should think she'd rent it or sell it," said practical Sahwah.

"She probably can't bear to part with these things, which remind her of

her former life," I said, sentimentally.

We were all anxious to see the woman who had been the mistress of so much splendor in days gone by and could not give up the house. The bedroom we were shown to was luxurious compared to what I had been used to at home. The bed was a mahogany four-poster covered with a spread of lace, and the rug on the floor was a faded oriental. Opening out of the bedroom was a bath with a shower and we made a dash to get under the cooling flood. I have never seen such towels as were stacked up on that little white table in the bathroom. They were all heavily embroidered with initials and the fringe on them was every bit of six inches long.

"The fringe for me!" exclaimed Sahwah, when she saw them. She seized a whole pile of them at once, using only the fringe for drying, and putting on affected aristocratic airs that made us shriek with laughter. We had been dressing all over the two rooms and the floor was strewn with towels and articles of clothing. Suddenly the door of the bedroom opened and a woman stood in the room. She was a gray-haired woman of about fifty, very handsome and proud-looking, and dressed in a gown of plum-colored satin. She said nothing; just looked at us. I glanced around at the others. There was Sahwah, her kimono wrapped loosely around her, patting her feet dry with the fringe of a dozen towels; Nyoda stood in front of the dressing-table with a towel wrapped around her, combing her hair: I was sitting on the floor putting my shoes on, while through the bathroom door came the sounds of the shower turned on full force, with an occasional shriek from Nakwisi when she got it too cold. Suddenly I felt unaccountably foolish. Nyoda and Sahwah looked up and saw the woman the next instant. She stood looking at us, her eyes nearly popping out of her head, her face purple, leaning against the foot of the bed for support. Nobody said a word. As Sahwah expressed it afterward, "Silence reigned, and we stood there in the rain."

"How did--how did you get in?" the woman gasped faintly, after a silence of a full minute. We knew something was wrong. We could feel it in the marrow of our bones.

Nyoda, holding her towel closely around her, answered in as dignified a manner as possible. "We were directed to your house from the hotel as a place where we could spend the night, and your maid admitted us and brought us in here. Is there anything the matter?"

The woman stood staring as if fascinated at the towels which were lying all over the floor. At that moment Nakwisi opened the door of the bath and emerged in her dressing-gown, the open door behind her revealing splashes of water all over the room and more towels on the floor. The woman put her hand to her throat as if she were choking. She tried to speak but evidently could not.

"Isn't this Mrs. Butler's house?" asked Nyoda, with growing misgiving. "Don't you take in tourists when the hotel is filled?"

The woman swallowed convulsively and found her voice. "No," she said, emphatically, "this is not Mrs. Butler's house, and I don't take in tourists when the hotel is filled. This is the McAlpine residence and my husband is State Senator McAlpine. My daughter is getting married to-night and we have a houseful of wedding guests. We had two special trains, one from Chicago and one from New York, bringing guests. If my maid let you in she thought you were some of them." Then she looked

around the room and seemed on the verge of apoplexy once more. "But how did you get in here?" she cried, wildly. "This is the bridal chamber!"

I suddenly felt weak in the back-bone, and thought my head was going to drop into my lap. The towel fell from Nyoda's shoulders and she stood there like a statue with her long hair around her. Sahwah stopped still with her foot on the stool and the handful of towels in her hand. For one moment we remained as if turned to stone and then Sahwah buried her face in the towels with a muffled shriek. If embarrassment ever killed people I know not one of us would have survived. Nyoda apologised profusely for our intrusion, which, after all, was not our fault, as we soon found. The hotel man had told us number 65 South Vine Street when it was number 65 North Vine Street he had meant.

We got dressed faster than we ever had before in our lives and packed up our scattered belongings, leaving the rooms nearly as tidy as they were when we came in. Mrs. McAlpine had withdrawn into the next room, and through the closed door we could hear the sound of excited talking and knew that she was telling the story to someone. When she had finished we heard a man's voice raised in a regular bellow. Evidently it had struck him as funny.

"No!" we heard him chortle. "You don't mean it! Got put into the bridal chamber, ha, ha! When you wouldn't let me put a foot into it! Took a bath and used up all the wedding towels that you wouldn't even let me touch! Oh, ha! ha! ha!" The very house seemed to shake with the violence of his mirth. Senator McAlpine, for we judged it was he, must have had a sense of humor. "Where are they?" we heard him shout. "Let me see them!"

But at the thought of facing that battery of laughter we fled in haste. Feeling unutterably small and ridiculous, we crept down-stairs and out of the front door, past numbers of people who were arriving. Once out on the sidewalk we leaned against the ornamental iron fence and laughed until we cried. The more we thought about it the funnier it seemed. What a tale we would have to tell the other girls when we met them in the morning!

As we had had our bath there only remained supper, and we certainly did justice to it when we finally arrived at Mrs. Butler's house on North Vine Street. It was after eight o'clock and we were ravenous. The rooms we had in that house, while they were nothing compared to what we almost had, were still very comfortable, and we were in such high spirits that any place at all would have looked good to us. Our long day in the open air had made us sleepy and it was not long before we were all touring in the Car of Dreams.

While we were eating breakfast in Mrs. Butler's big, airy dining-room we heard a boy arrive at the kitchen door and ask for the "automobile ladies." He had been sent out from the telegraph office and the hotel clerk had told him where we were. He handed Nyoda a message. As she read it a surprised and puzzled look came into her face.

"What is it, Nyoda?" we all cried.

She handed us the bit of yellow paper. It was what is called a service message from the telegraph company, and read: "Message sent Gladys Evans Potter Hotel Ft. Wayne undelivered. No such party registered."

CHAPTER III.

We stared in open-mouthed astonishment. Gladys and the others not in Ft. Wayne? If they weren't there, where were they? We were expecting to join them this very morning. Nyoda came to a sensible conclusion first, as she always does, "Where are they?" she repeated. "Why, stranded in some place along the road, just as we are, of course. We're not the only ones that can have accidents. I thought Gladys would get into some trouble or other at the rate she was driving that car. I hope none of them got hurt, but it serves them right if they did have a hold-up of some kind. And I hope the trouble, whatever it is, keeps them tied up until we overtake them. We must ask at every village whether the Striped Beetle is there. Wouldn't we laugh to see them standing around some garage waiting impatiently for the damage to be mended?"

It was nine o'clock before the Glow-worm was in running order again and we were ready to take the road once more. Since being towed into the repair shop the night before we had seen nothing of the Frog, and I concluded that he had gone on his way and would cross our path no more. But we had not gone many miles on the road when I saw the now familiar roadster traveling leisurely along behind us. I mentioned the fact casually to Nyoda as I was sitting beside her, and while she made no comment whatever, I noticed that she began gradually to increase the pace of the car. As yet neither of us had hinted at our unspoken antagonism to this persistent follower--for Nyoda was antagonistic to him, because I noticed that she bit her lip in an annoyed way when she saw him again. After all, he might not be following us. He certainly had every right in the world to be traveling in the general direction of Chicago over the public highway at the same time we were making our trip.

And yet--why did he stay all night in S---- when there was nothing the matter with his car, and when accommodations were so very scarce. We hadn't the least idea where he had stayed, but he must have been in S---- all night or he couldn't have followed us out in the morning. Even that fact, which might have been a coincidence, did not convince me so much that he was following us as my own intuition did. And I have learned by experience to respect those intuitions. Out of a whole dining-room full that man had been the only one who had attracted my attention, and I felt antagonistic toward him instantly. I had the same feeling when I saw him behind us on the road to Napoleon. And the worst part of it was that he had done absolutely nothing to make me feel that way toward him. He hadn't been impertinent, in fact, he had never said a single word to any of us! All he had done was to stare searchingly at Nyoda through that goggle mask of his. There was nothing the matter with his looks, goodness knows. All we could see under the big goggles were part of a nose and a brown mustache and they looked harmless enough. Then why did Nyoda and I both have the same feeling toward him?

We inquired carefully all the way, but nowhere did we come upon any trace of the Striped Beetle. At several places they had seen the brown car go by the day before and at one place it had stopped for gasoline, but no one knew of any repairs that had been made on it. The thing began to loom up like a puzzle. If the Striped Beetle had not been delayed by accident why had not Gladys arrived in Ft. Wayne the night

before as per schedule.

"Possibly they did arrive all right, and didn't go to a hotel because you weren't with them," suggested Sahwah. "Gladys may have friends there and they may have stayed with them." That fact was so very probable that we ceased to worry about the girls, trusting that the whole thing would be made clear when we got to Ft. Wayne.

We were in Indiana now, running through beautiful farm country, with occasional tiny villages. Sahwah made up a game, estimating the number of windmills we would see in a certain time and then counting them as we passed to see how near she came to being right. As we were keeping a sharp lookout on each side of the road so as not to miss any, we saw a girl running across a field toward the road just ahead of us. She was waving her arms and we looked to see whom or what she was waving at, but there was nothing in sight.

"I actually believe she's waving at us!" said Sahwah. There was no mistake about it. The girl stood still in the road waiting for us to come up and motioned us to stop. We did so. She stood and looked at us for a minute as if she were afraid to speak. I looked back to see if the Frog was gaining on us. The red roadster had disappeared. The girl who stood before us looked about eighteen or twenty. She wore a plain suit of dark blue cloth with a long skirt down to the ground and a white sailor hat with a veil draped around it that covered her face. In her hand she held a small traveling bag. She looked beseechingly from one to the other of us and then her eyes came back to Nyoda.

"Could you--would you--will you take me to Decatur?" she faltered. "I'll pay you whatever you think it's worth," she added hastily. Now Decatur was out of our course altogether, some miles to the south. We were hurrying to Ft. Wayne to find out what had become of Gladys and why our telegram had come back unanswered. But this girl was plainly in trouble. Through the veil we could see that her face looked haggard and her eyes were big and staring. She looked frightened to death. No girl in trouble ever came to Nyoda in vain.

"Do you want to go to Decatur very badly?" she asked, gently.

"I must go," said the girl, earnestly. "I have to catch a train there, the train for Louisville." She checked herself when she had said that and looked around as if afraid she had been overheard.

"But why go to Decatur?" asked Nyoda. "You can get the Louisville train in Ft. Wayne. We are going directly to Ft. Wayne and are nearer there now than Decatur. We will be very glad to take you along."

But at the mention of Ft. Wayne the girl shrank back. "No, no, not there," she said in evident terror. "They--they would be watching for me there."

Nyoda looked at the girl keenly. She must have seen what we did not. "My dear," she said, in a big sister tone, "are you running away from home?"

The girl started and looked haunted. "Yes, I am running away," she said in a tone of desperation, "but I'm not running away from home. I'm running back home. Home to my mother." She looked over her shoulder at a house set far back from the road.

"Tell me about it," said Nyoda, with that smile of hers that never fails to win a confidence. The girl looked into Nyoda's eyes and did not look away again. It's the way everybody does.

"I'm Margery Anderson," she said. "You know now who I am and why I'm running away."

Yes, we all knew. The papers all over had been full of the fight Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, who were separated, had been making to get possession of their daughter Margery. The law had given her to her mother, but she had been kidnapped twice by her father and the last that had been published about her was that she was in the keeping of an uncle, who was hiding her from her mother. But the papers had said that Margery was only thirteen years old. This girl looked older.

"My uncle wants to take me to Japan, where I'll never see my mother again," she said. "I want my mother!" she finished with a very childish sob.

Nyoda got out of the car and put her arm around her. "You shall go to your mother, my dear," she said. "We'll take you to Decatur."

In walking to the car Margery fell all over the long skirt she was wearing, and then we realized that she was dressed up in someone else's clothes to make herself look older. She was only thirteen after all. Nyoda had been able to observe this right away when she had looked at her closely. She was as straight and as slender as a boy and the jacket modeled for an older woman hung on her as on a pole.

"Do you know the road to Decatur?" asked Nyoda. Margery said that she did, and told Nyoda how to turn. Our arrival in Ft. Wayne would be delayed an hour or so by going to Decatur, but none of us minded. We were all keenly interested in this much talked of young girl and were anxious to see her get to her mother before her uncle could stop her. Who would not have done the same thing in our place?

"What time does the Louisville train leave Decatur?" asked Nyoda, looking at her watch.

"Eleven-thirty," said Margery.

Nyoda put the watch back hastily and increased the speed of the car. She did not say what time it was and none of us asked her, thinking that the time might be short and Margery would be worried for fear we would not make it. We knew Nyoda would make it if she possibly could do so. Margery looked at her inquiringly, and Nyoda answered with a bright reassuring smile. Once Nyoda and I caught each other looking behind at the same moment and we each smiled faintly. The red roadster was nowhere in sight. By making this detour to Decatur while it was delayed on the road we had undoubtedly thrown it off the track.

We could not have been many miles from Decatur when a shot startled us. We all looked around expecting to see Margery's uncle after us, but it was only the bursting of a tire. Only the bursting of a tire! But to this day I hold that that tire did not burst of its own accord. Fate deliberately jabbed a pin into it. We carried an extra and with the help of a farmer who was passing we jacked up the Glow-worm in a hurry and put on its new gum shoe, Margery walked up and down the road

nervously during the process. I suppose the minutes seemed like hours to her.

I beguiled the time by scribbling verses in my note-book to celebrate the occasion:

"Tires, brand new tires, I know not what they mean,
Freshly inflated from the Free Air pump,
Giving no warning of their base designs,
Scatter in air with a terrific bang,
And all upon a sudden are no more.

"Sweeter it is than dreams of paradise
To ride with friends beside one in one's car,
O'er sunlit roads; past fields of waving grain.
Bitter it is as drops of greenest gall,
To blow a tire, and sit there in the sun."

At this juncture the exchange of tires was completed and we were off once more. I saw Nyoda look at her watch.

"What time is it?" asked Margery.

"My watch has stopped," answered Nyoda. There was a clock on the corner of two streets in the next village we passed through and the hands pointed to eleven. This would give us plenty of time. We were not far from Decatur. We all breathed a sigh of relief, for we had been afraid that the bursting of the tire had caused us to miss the train. Nyoda calculated closely and announced that we would have time to stop and buy gasoline. She was not sure whether we had enough to make Decatur or not, and it would be a shame to go dry outside the very walls of Rome, she said. It took the young boy in charge of the place where they sold the gasoline some minutes to fill our tank, as he was only looking after the place while the proprietor was out and he was awkward. It was ten minutes after eleven when we got under way again. Nyoda set her watch by the clock.

When we got into Decatur we had an unpleasant surprise. All the clocks we came to said ten minutes to twelve. The other clock we had seen had been half an hour slow. We hurried to the station in the hope that the train was late, but there was no such luck. It had been on time for once. Margery sank down on the seat in the waiting-room and looked at us with wide frightened eyes. Clearly she was appealing to Nyoda to tell her what to do.

"When is the next train to Louisville?" Nyoda inquired at the ticket window.

"None until to-morrow noon," was the reply.

Margery looked so dismayed that Nyoda said hastily, "Why won't you go to Ft. Wayne and get the train there? The fast trains that don't stop here stop there and you can get one later in the day."

But Margery looked more frightened than ever. "I can't go to Ft. Wayne," she said. "My uncle would expect me to go there and would have the station watched. That's why I wanted to go to Decatur. They would never think of looking there for me. What shall I do. I know I'll never get to mother!"

She looked so young and babyish and helpless that Nyoda made up her mind on the spot that she was not the kind of girl who could be left on her own resources.

"Tell me," she said, "does your mother expect you to-morrow?"

Margery shook her head. "She doesn't even know that I'm coming."

"Then," said Nyoda decidedly, "I'm not going to leave you to find your way there alone. We will be going through Louisville in a few days and you're going to stay right with us until we get there. Your uncle will probably be having trains watched and would never think of you in an automobile. It is the best solution of the problem. We'll get you a dress and veil like the other girls and everyone will think you are one of our party. In that case you don't need to be afraid to go to Ft. Wayne, where we must stop, as we will not go near a railway station."

Margery agreed to this plan with such an air of relief that it was plain to be seen what an ordeal it had been for her to try to travel alone.

With this delay of having to go to Decatur it was past noon before we got to Ft. Wayne. Once there we were at a loss how to proceed to find the Striped Beetle and the girls. I believe everyone of us confidently expected to find them waiting for us at some point where the road entered the city, and it threw us off our bearings to find they were not there. Even Nyoda was plainly puzzled what to do. We found the little Potter Hotel where we were to have stayed and asked to see the register. It was possible that the girls had been there after all in spite of the telegram not having been delivered. Telegrams have failed to connect before. But they had not been there. If they had stayed with friends we did not know where they were now. It was a riddle. Not getting any light on the subject we decided to eat our dinner before we looked farther.

We checked our cameras and the man at the checking counter looked at us closely when we came up. There was no one else there and he seemed inclined to be talkative.

"There was a party just like you here yesterday," he said.

"What do you mean by 'just like us?'" we asked.

"Same clothes," he answered. "Four girls in tan suits and green veils and one in a blue suit and white veil."

We all looked at each other. The four girls were evidently ours, but who was the one in blue?

"What time were they here?" we asked.

"About five o'clock yesterday afternoon," he answered. "They checked some things here and then went into the dining-room."

Five o'clock was the time we should all have reached Ft. Wayne if things had gone right.

"Have you any idea where they have gone now?" we asked, eagerly.

"They were on their way to Chicago, going through Ligonier," answered the man. "I heard them talking about it. They seemed to be in a great hurry and were only in the dining-room about fifteen minutes. The one in blue kept telling them to make haste."

"The plot thickens," said Sahwah. "Gladys is mixed up in some adventure of her own, apparently. She's not running away from us for the fun of the thing, you can rest assured. I never thought so from the first. She's probably taking some distressed damsel to Chicago in a grand rush and counts on us to trust her until we catch up with her and hear the explanation."

"Yes," agreed Nyoda, "she must have had some urgent reason for acting so, that's a foregone conclusion."

"It's a _four gone_ one all right," said Sahwah, but Nyoda's mind was too busy with wondering about Gladys to notice the pun.

"I think the best thing to do is to follow them as fast as we can," said Sahwah.

"I think so too," said Nyoda.

Puzzled as we were about Gladys's strange behavior, we were yet relieved of all anxiety about the Striped Beetle and its passengers. The girls were on their way to Chicago by way of Ligonier, the way we had planned in the beginning, and had undoubtedly not fallen by the wayside. We did wait long enough in Ft. Wayne to buy Margery a suit and veil just like ours and were surprised and gratified to find that we could get a suit exactly like ours down to the last button.

"Who do you suppose the girl in blue is with Gladys?" we asked each other, as we took the road again. But, of course, no one could answer this.

I was sitting in the front seat beside Nyoda. We had not gone very far on the way when I saw her knit her brows in a frown and heard her mutter to herself, "I thought we had lost you!" At the same time she increased the speed of the car. Naturally, I looked ahead in the direction in which she was looking, but there was nothing in sight. Then I looked behind. About a hundred yards behind us was the red roadster with the Frog calmly sitting at the wheel. How did Nyoda know he was there? She had not turned around since we had left Ft. Wayne.

"Have you an eye in the back of your head?" I asked, curiously.

"No, but I have one in the back of my collar," she answered, trying to hide her annoyance in a joke. "I just had a feeling he was there," she added.

This time I actually had a chill when I saw him. There was something terrifying in that figure always following us, never coming any nearer, never saying anything, but yet, never losing sight of us. Those mask-like goggles and the cap he wore pulled low over his face made him look like one of the creatures you see in a bad dream.

We had spent so much time in Ft. Wayne looking for a suit for Margery that it was four o'clock before we finally got under way. The morning

had been fine, but the afternoon was misty and chilly. It must have rained not long before, for the road was muddy. We did not make such very good time, for the car began to act badly, and it was soon evident that something was wrong. We began to run slowly. Involuntarily, I glanced around to see how much the roadster was gaining on us. It had slowed down too and was going at exactly our pace. By this time the other girls could not help noticing that it was following us. Margery crouched in the seat and clung to Sahwah's arm. She was sure it was her uncle after her, and then I had to explain that the Frog had been following us all the way from Toledo, before we had taken her in.

We had expected to make Ligonier in a very short time and reach South Bend before night, but as things turned out we never got there at all. Somewhere between Ligonier and Goshen, at a little town called Wellsville, the poor Glow-worm must have been taken with awful pains in its insides, for it began to pant and gasp like a creature in misery, and utter little squeals of distress. There was nothing left to do but hunt up the one garage in town, which fortunately had a repair shop in connection with it, and get someone to look at the engine. I don't pretend to know anything about the machinery of the car, so I haven't the slightest idea what was the matter, but the man talked knowingly about magnetos and carburetors and said he could have the trouble fixed by eight o'clock in the evening. We were vexed that it should take so long, because we had expected to make South Bend early in the evening, but there was no help for it, so we repaired to the hotel next door--"hotel" by courtesy, for it was nothing more than a wayside inn--for supper.

It was raining a fine drizzle, and, as we did not care to walk around in it, after supper we sat in the stuffy parlor and tried to pass away the hours until the Glow-worm would be cured of its sickness and we could resume our journey. The carpet on the floor was a mixture of hideous red and pink roses on a green background. I can see that carpet yet. It was a Brussels, and Sahwah kept referring to it as one of the Belgian Atrocities. There was a larger room opening out of the parlor in which we sat, a sort of general reception and smoking-room combined. There was an old square piano out there and some young man was banging ragtime on it, while half a dozen others leaned over it and roared out songs in several different keys at once. All around the room sat men, smoking until the air was blue, and talking in loud voices, or shouting snatches of the songs. They seemed a rather noisy lot and from the scraps of conversation we heard we judged that they had come from somewhere to attend the September horse races which were being held in the neighborhood. At any rate, the hotel was swarming with them and we were glad that we were to get out of there by eight o'clock and did not have to stay all night. Once one of them walked into the parlor where we sat and said "Good evenin', ladies," in an impertinent sort of way, but we all froze him up with a glance and he went out without saying anything more to us. We saw him cross the other room toward a door at the farther side, and, as he crossed the floor we saw someone else get up from a chair in the corner of the room and go out after him. The second man was right under a light and we recognized the Frog, still with his goggles and cap on. Soon there came a loud uproar from the invisible room and unmistakable sounds of scuffling. We waited to hear no more. If there was going to be a quarrel in that hotel we did not wish to see any of it. We ran out in the rain and went into the garage where the man was working on the Glow-worm. The quarrel we had fled from didn't amount to anything after all, I suppose, for in a few minutes we heard the men back at their singing.

It was now nearly eight o'clock and we looked anxiously from time to time at the Glow-worm to see if it was nearly finished, but some of the parts were scattered out on the floor and the man was wrenching away at what was left in the car and did not seem to be in any hurry to put the others back. At eight o'clock it was not done and Nyoda asked him how soon it would be.

"Not before nine or nine-thirty, Miss," replied the man.

The rain had stopped and we walked up and down the main street for the next two hours, stopping in at the garage every time we passed, in the vain hope that the work was finished and we could go on. But it was not to be so. It was half past ten before it was finally ready and that was too late to start. We realized that we would have to stay in that inn all night, much as we were disinclined to do so. The racket was still in full blast when we returned and were shown to rooms. We had to go up on the third floor because the other rooms were all taken by the racketeers. The ceiling sloped down on our heads and the windows were small and the furniture was exceedingly cheap, but it was a place to stay and that was the main thing.

"There's only one quilt on my bed," said Nakwisi rather disdainfully, "and I don't believe that has more than an eighth of an inch of batting in it."

"I think an eighth of an inch is a pretty good batting average for a hotel quilt," giggled Sahwah, whose spirits nothing can dampen.

We made up our minds to get up at six o'clock and get a good early start the next morning. As things turned out we got a much earlier start than we had anticipated. Margery didn't like the room at all and cried while she was undressing, and Nyoda had to pet her and make a fuss over her before she would lie down in the bed. I couldn't help wondering just what Nyoda would have done to one of us if we had cried about that hotel room. But then Margery isn't a Winnebago, and that makes a lot of difference.

We went to sleep with the banging of the piano and the sound of the songs floating up from downstairs, and each of us puzzling about the appearance of the Frog and wondering why he hadn't approached us in the parlor if he were really trying to make our acquaintance. Possibly he meant to, later, only we upset his plan by going out when we did, I reflected. It really had been rather an eventful day, I thought, even if we hadn't made much progress with our trip. Think of spending a whole day in going a distance that should have consumed at the most only a few hours! We really must get an early start to-morrow and make Chicago in good time, or be laughed at for running a lame duck race, I thought as I dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

I woke up with the strangest feeling I have ever had in my life. I remember dreaming that we had left the door open, and all the tobacco smoke from below had floated up into the room and was choking me. When

I first awoke I thought that the racketers were still at it below, for from somewhere there came a horrible din. There was the sound of many voices shouting unintelligible things, when suddenly above the roar one voice shrieked out "Fire!" Then I knew. The room was filled with smoke, dense and choking.

"Wake up!" I shouted, shaking Sahwah, who was sleeping with me. I dragged her out of bed and we two ran into the other room where Nyoda and Nakwisi and Margery were sleeping. The smoke was still thicker there and I believe they must have been nearly suffocated. We had hard work rousing them. Above the shouts of the people in the street below we could hear an ominous crackling that increased every minute. At first I was so frightened I could hardly move. It was the first time I had ever been in a burning building. The time the tepee burned we were out of it in one jump, before we had realized what had happened. I shudder yet, when I hear crackling wood.

Nyoda's voice roused me to action. She had regained her wits and was cool-headed as usual. Margery clung to her and screamed and she shook her and told her to be quiet.

"Carry out your clothes if you can find them, girls," she said calmly, "but don't wait to put anything on."

We groped through the smoke and found our clothes on the chair beside the bed, and gathering them up went out into the hall. The hotel was old-fashioned, with a long, narrow wooden hallway running the entire length of the up-stairs, crossed in places by other halls. Somewhere along that hall was the stairway; we had a dim remembrance of the direction from which we had come up the night before. We had to grope our way along by keeping our hands on the wall, for the smoke was so thick that it was impossible to see a step before us. We reached the stairs at last. After one look we jumped back in alarm. The whole stairway was one mass of leaping flames. I have never seen such a dreadful sight. We groped our way back toward our rooms, which were at the front of the building, intending to lean out of the windows and shout for help from below. But we lost our way in the smoke and could not find the way back. There we were, caught like rats in a trap, with the flames beginning to come through the floor in places, and the smoke rolling around us in blinding, suffocating clouds. There was no escape, then. We were to perish in this hotel blaze. Would we ever be identified? How soon would they know at home? All these things flashed through my mind as we stood there in the midst of that awful nightmare.

Suddenly something appeared out of the smoke close beside us, something white and ghostlike. Then a voice spoke. "Follow me, girls," it said, and we knew that the ghost was a man with a towel tied over his face. "All of you get in line behind your mother," said the voice thickly, "and each one hold onto the one in front of you. Don't let go, or you'll be lost and I can't watch you."

We didn't even smile at his thinking Nyoda was our mother. With the military precision we have learned from long practice of doing things together, we formed in a goose line behind Nyoda, each one gripping tightly the hand of the one ahead of her, and thus we began to move forward. After what seemed a hundred years, but could not have been more than five minutes, we felt a gust of fresh air blowing on us, and knew that we were standing beside an open window.

"This window looks out on the roof of the second story at the back of the building," said the voice, "and it's an easy drop to the roof."

We had to take his word for it, for the smoke obscured everything so that we did not know whether we were going to drop three feet or thirty. The air coming in the window blew the smoke away from our faces for a moment and we got a breath, or otherwise I am afraid we would have strangled on the verge of being rescued. Without a moment's hesitation the hands that belonged to the towel and the voice seized Nyoda and swung her out of the window as if she had been a feather, and in a moment her "All right" told that she had landed safely on the roof. One by one he took us in the same manner. We were still in a dangerous position, for there was fire under us, although the worst blaze was at the front of the building, and as far as we could see there were no ladders anywhere around waiting to take us down.

"Confound these one-horse country towns, anyway", we heard the voice mutter, "that can't support a decent Fire Department."

"Here," he shouted to the gaping crowd below who were watching the few that were trying to fight the flames with garden hoses, "bring blankets, hurry!"

It was rather a thrilling moment when we stood on that burning building waiting for the blankets to come into which we were to jump. Now that I look back at it I think we must have been a funny sight, for while we stood there we threw on our jackets over our night-dresses and held the rest of our belongings in our hands. With all the rest of her impedimenta Nyoda had rescued her camera, Nakwisi her spy-glass and I my note-book, and they gave us an odd, jaunty tourist appearance which must have been amusing. Well, the people came running with blankets and held them for us to jump and we jumped, although we had to throw Margery down. She stood there trembling, afraid to jump and there was no time to argue the necessity of prompt action. We gathered up our possessions from the people to whom we had tossed them and hastened into a near-by house where we got ourselves dressed.

Our rescuer had jumped right after us, and by the time we had picked ourselves up and got our breath back enough to thank him he had vanished from the scene. He must have been the proprietor, we judged, for he knew the inside of the hotel so well. Possibly he went back to rescue some more of his patrons.

After we were dressed we returned to the scene of the fire, which had drawn people from all the country around, in the usual half-dressed state in which people go to midnight fires. Of course, there was no hope of saving the building, for the few thin streams of water that were playing on it went up in steam as soon as they touched the blaze. The walls fell in with terrifying crashes and the roof caved in like a pasteboard box. It had been nothing but a dry shell of a building and burned like tinder.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," said Sahwah, giggling nervously, "that piano is a hopeless ruin and the people around here won't have to listen to it any more. And even if they do rebuild the hotel they can never get another piano like it, for there aren't two such tin pans in existence."

After the rain had stopped that night a fog had settled down and the

glare of the flames through the mist made a weird lurid scene that I shall never forget. All this time the wind had been from the east, which drove the flames toward an open square where they could set nothing else afire, but suddenly it veered to the west, and showers of burning brands began to fall on the roof of the garage where the Glow-worm was standing. The scanty water force was then turned to save this building and we had several anxious moments until the wind shifted again.

"How foolish I was not to have taken the car out immediately," said Nyoda. Other people were hurrying to the spot to rescue their cars and we also went over. The interior of the place had not been damaged by the small blazes which had been kindled on the roof, though I tremble to think what might have happened if the gasoline stored inside had exploded. Thankful that fortune had favored us so far in this night of accident, we took our way among the other cars in the place to where the Glow-worm had stood. Then we rubbed our eyes and looked at each other. For where the Glow-worm had been when we left the place the night before there was an empty space. A hasty search through the place, which was not very large, revealed that the car was gone. Frantically we rushed after the proprietor, who was standing in the doorway watching the grand spectacle next door. He knew nothing about the matter. The car had been there when he closed up that night, but as soon as the fire broke out people had been coming for their cars and the place had been open. He was much excited over it and declared that such a thing had never happened before as long as he had been in business, but then, he added, neither had the hotel ever burned down before.

To say that we were dismayed was putting it mildly. To have your own car stolen is bad enough, but when it is a car belonging to someone else who has kindly loaned it to you to take a pleasure trip in, it is ten times worse. Nyoda had promised to bring the car back in safety and she was almost beside herself at the thought of its being stolen. None of us ever felt like facing Mr. Evans again. We reproached ourselves a thousand times that we had not gone for the Glow-worm immediately upon getting out of the burning building, without waiting to dress or stand around and watch the walls fall. We searched vainly through the line of motors moving up and down the street for the familiar black body and yellow lamps of the Glow-worm.

Discouraged and heartsick over this new calamity, we retired to the park-like square on the other side of the hotel to talk things over and lay out our course of action. Through the trees in the square we could see something moving along the road, and, by a sudden glare from the fire we made out the Glow-worm, proceeding slowly and silently in the opposite direction, and the man at the wheel was the Frog! We all darted after him, shouting "Stop thief!" at the top of our voices. The Frog turned around in the seat, saw us streaming across the square, and evidently decided that the chase was too hot, for he jammed on the brakes and jumped from the car, leaving the motor still running. He ran into a clump of shrubbery and disappeared from sight.

We were too glad to get the car back to hunt for the thief and bring him to justice. In our relief from the dismay of the moment before we were ready to hug the old Glow-worm.

"Girls," said Nyoda, "what do you say to starting out for South Bend this very minute? I don't believe any of us could sleep any more to-

night even if we had a place to do it, which is extremely doubtful. It's positive folly to leave this car standing around here any longer. That garage man is too much interested in the fire to take care of his business. We have no belongings to go back after, for everything we left in the hotel is lost."

We were thankful then that we had carried so little hand luggage, for beyond a few toilet articles which could easily be replaced at the next town we had lost nothing. The trunk with our extra clothes was carried on the car. We agreed to Nyoda's proposal eagerly. Sleep for the rest of the night was out of the question and we might as well be driving as not. It would be a good way to get an appetite for breakfast, we all agreed.

"Jump in, girls," said Nyoda, taking her place behind the wheel. "You sit up here with me, Margery."

Then we had the second shock of the evening. Margery was nowhere to be seen! We were all sure that she had been there just a moment ago, clinging to Sahwah's arm and squealing, although we could not remember whether she had been with us when we ran across the park after the Glow-worm or not.

"She has gotten separated from us in the crowd," said Nyoda. "You girls run and find her while I stay here and watch the car."

We hunted everywhere, high and low, asking everybody we met, but there was no trace of her. Finally, we ran into the garage man and thought it only fair to tell him that we had found the car. He was much overjoyed at the fact and listened sympathetically when we told him we had lost Margery.

"Did she have on a tan suit like yours?" he asked.

"Yes," we answered eagerly, "have you seen her?"

"I saw a girl in a tan suit driving away just a minute ago with a man in a red roadster," he answered.

"What did the man look like?" we asked.

"I can't tell you much about his looks," replied the garage man. "He wore great big green goggles that covered up half of his face. Looked just like a frog."

We looked at each other in dismay. The Frog had run off with Margery! We ran in haste to tell the news to Nyoda.

"It's queer," she said. "He must be one of her relations after all, though I surely thought he had begun to follow us from Toledo. But it might have been only a coincidence that he was behind us then, for after all he never said anything to us."

"But why did he take our car first, if it was Margery he was after all the while?" I asked.

"So we couldn't follow him," said Sahwah, with startling clear-sightedness.

Nyoda, who doesn't believe in premonitions, had one then. "I don't believe he's a relative of hers at all," she said, flatly. "I have a feeling in my bones that he isn't. I also have a feeling that something has happened to Margery which it is our business to investigate."

In less time than it takes to tell about it we had inquired the direction taken by the driver of the red roadster and had started in pursuit. The fog was closing in on us thicker than ever and the Glow-worm's eyes shone dimly through the white curtain. We could not go ahead at full speed because we had to proceed slowly and carefully. The fact that the road was exceptionally good along here was the only thing that kept us from accident, I suppose. If we had struck some of the holes that we did a distance back--

We were divided between joy over the fact that the Frog couldn't go any faster than we were going in that fog and so couldn't use his powerful car to his advantage, and the fear that he would slip off into some side road without our noticing it and so escape us. The fog naturally muffled all sounds, but we recognized at last the steady throbbing of a motor ahead of us on the road and knew that we were on the trail of the fugitives. We didn't know whether the Frog knew we were after him or not, but it seemed to us that the throbs began to grow fainter after a time as if the car were getting farther away. Finally, they stopped altogether and we began to realize that after all we had not much chance to catch up with that powerful car.

"They're leaving us behind," said Sahwah, in a disappointed tone

The next instant we crashed full into a car that was standing still in the road and which loomed out of the fog with the suddenness of an apparition. Nyoda had jammed on the emergency brake a half minute before we struck or there would have been a worse smash. As it was the Glow-worm was shaken from end to end and I can imagine what the stalled car felt like.

We experienced all the thrills of the heroines in the moving picture plays when we ran into that car and expected to see the grotesque face of the Frog in the light of our lamps, with the terrified Margery nearby. The next minute showed us our mistake. The man who was standing beside his car in the road, when we had torpedoed it from the rear was not the Frog. It was a man we had never seen before. He was all alone. The automobile was not the red roadster, but a limousine.

We all sprang out to see what damage had been done the Glow-worm. We were relieved to find it not so terrible after all. Nyoda had given the steering-wheel a sharp twist the instant she saw she was going to strike something, and the car glanced to one side, so that it was the right front wheel and fender that actually struck. The limousine was in worse shape. Our wheel had jammed into its rear wheel and torn it off, while the side of the Glow-worm had scraped across the hack of the bigger car, splintering the wood in places. Every window in the limousine had been broken by the shock.

The driver of the battered car stood and looked gloomily at the havoc we had wrought.

"Can't you look where you're going?" he burst out angrily.

"You didn't have your tail lamp lit," replied Nyoda calmly, "and we

couldn't see you in the fog. I tried to turn out but it was too late."

"It's true," said the man, pacifically. "It's my fault, or rather the fault of the car. I couldn't make the lights burn. That's why I was standing here. I was afraid to go ahead in the fog."

Then I suppose he was afraid that we could bring suit against him for the damage done to the Glow-worm because he was standing in the road without any lights, for he left the limousine and came and looked carefully at what had happened to us. He was much relieved when he saw it was no worse. The front wheel wobbled tipsily and the fender was torn off, but these it appeared were not mortal wounds. His eye went back from our car to his.

"It's a good thing no one was riding in the back," he said thoughtfully, looking at the shattered windows. At that very moment a wail rose from somewhere, coming apparently from the inside of the limousine. Startled, he leaped over and pulled the door open. He turned a pocket flash into the car and we could all see that there was somebody lying on the floor half under the seat. It was a girl in a tan suit. When the light was flashed into her face she looked up and saw us. Then she sat up. It was Margery.

"Margery!" exclaimed Nyoda. "What are you doing here?"

Margery got out of the tipping car and ran to Nyoda and hung on her arm. She was trembling so she could hardly stand. She looked from one to the other of us with big frightened eyes. The owner of the limousine regarded her in wide-eyed astonishment.

"How did you get into that car?" asked Nyoda, gently.

"I hid in it," said Margery. "In the garage. And he," she pointed to the man, "drove away and I was afraid to come out."

"What made you hide in the car?" asked Nyoda.

Margery gave a quick glance around. "I saw my uncle," she said in a half whisper. "He was looking at the fire. He didn't see me. I ran away and hid in the garage and when people began coming for their cars I was afraid they would find me and I got into this one. Pretty soon my uncle came into the garage. I was down on the floor of the limousine and he didn't see me. Just then the driver got up in front and began to take the car out, but I didn't dare open the door and come out. He drove away with me and I didn't know what to do, so I stayed in. Then the car stopped on the road and I was going to get out and run away when the other car came up behind and ran into us. I was afraid it was my uncle and didn't even come out when the car nearly fell over. But I was frightened and cried and you heard me and opened the door."

"Tell me," said Nyoda, "was your uncle the man with the goggles?"

"No," answered Margery, "he wasn't. My uncle is a little, thin man with gray hair."

"It's a mercy you weren't hurt," said Nyoda, thinking with a shudder of the blow we had dealt the limousine. "You did get cut," she cried, turning the flashlight full on her face. The blood was running down her cheek from a cut in her forehead and her arm was also bleeding. We tied

her up with strips of handkerchiefs and set her on the back seat of the Glow-worm.

The owner of the limousine decided to leave it there and come for it in the morning, and, as our engine was not hurt we thought best to drive on. The man offered to pay for having our wheel fixed and the fender put on again and seemed dreadfully afraid we were going to sue him. He gave us his name and address and told us to send the bill to him. He lived in the neighborhood and could find his way home on foot.

After he had disappeared in the fog and the Glow-worm was once more proceeding on her journey, we suddenly realized that we did not know where we were nor in which direction we were going. We were not on the road to Chicago, we knew, because the road we had followed out of Wellsville in pursuit of the Frog had gone off at right angles to that road. At the time we had thought only of finding out what had become of Margery and had followed him blindly. The fog was getting thicker instead of thinner and it was impossible to see anything like a sign post. A sharp east wind was blowing that chilled us to the bone. It was rather a dismal situation we found ourselves in. Of all kinds of bad weather I hate fog the worst. It makes me feel as if I had lost my last friend. Nyoda hadn't any idea where she was going, but she kept the car moving slowly, hoping that we would come to a town pretty soon. We sounded the horn constantly to warn any other vehicles on the road and Nakwisi offered to sit in front and keep a lookout with her telescope.

"Telescope!" said Sahwah, scornfully. "What you want is a collide-o-scope!" Whereupon we all pinched her for making a pun and went on shivering.

Just when we got off the road I don't know, but gradually we became aware that it was not hard earth we were riding over but something that swished under the wheels like long grass.

"We're in a field!" cried Sahwah.

Nyoda turned the car around and we went a few yards, expecting to get back into the road every minute. Then suddenly the car began to go down hill very rapidly, and at the bottom there was a grand splash, and we found ourselves up to the wheel hubs in water. We had run into a stream of some kind. The bottom was soft mud and to keep from sinking we had to go on across. Luckily it was shallow and not very wide and the water did not come inside the car. Margery screamed all the way across and we had a rather breathless few minutes, until we came out on the farther bank. Once on dry land again Nyoda stopped the car and flatly refused to drive another inch. We were off the road, we had no idea where we were, and there was too much danger of running into things in the fog. None of us dared to think what might have happened if that river had been deep.

So here we were stranded, at about two o'clock in the morning, in a field nobody knew where, by a road whose direction we could not even guess, with a thick mantle of fog rolling around us as dense as the smoke had been a few hours before. Could it have been only a few hours before that we came near burning to death? And now we were in nearly as much danger of freezing to death. Fire and dampness all in one night! It certainly was a varied experience.

And the cold was no joke. It pierced the very marrow of our bones. We

were not dressed for any such weather as that. We had had two blankets in the car but there was only one left when we recovered it from the Frog. Sahwah suggested that we join hands around the Glow-worm and sing "When the mists have rolled away".

"You'll have to get out and walk around, if you don't want to catch cold," said Nyoda. We walked up and down for a while, each with a hand on the other's shoulder so as not to get separated and lost in the fog. This walk soon turned into a snake dance and then a war dance around the Glow-worm. It must have been a weird sight if anyone had seen us, ghostly figures flitting about in the illumined fog around the car. I suppose they would have taken us for dancing nymphs or will-o'-the-wisps, or some other creatures which inhabit the swamps.

We really became hilarious as we danced, although it was a serious business of keeping warm, and on the whole I would not have missed that night for anything. I adore unusual experiences and I'm sure not many people have been stalled in a fog when on an automobile trip and have had to spend the night dancing to keep warm. Margery didn't see the funny side of it, and you really couldn't blame her, poor thing, for it was all her fault that we were in this mess and she had been so badly frightened earlier in the night and then so shaken up when the Glow-worm ran into the limousine.

She didn't want to dance to keep warm and sat shivering in the car with the one blanket around her, except when Nyoda made her get out and exercise.

Morning came at last and when the sun rose the fog lifted. We found ourselves in the middle of a field some distance from the road, near the stream into which we had plunged the night before. We must have been off the road for some time before we noticed it. The place where we had run off was where the road turned and we had kept on straight ahead instead of turning. We got out of the field and followed the road. It was not a regular automobile road and was not sign-posted. We did not know whether we had gone north or south from Wellsville the night before. The fog had us completely turned around. By the position of the sun, the road extended toward the south. How far we had come we could not tell. We thought of going back to Wellsville and striking the main road again, but then Nyoda decided that by finding a road which ran toward the west we could strike the other trunk line route that went up to South Bend by way of Rochester and Plymouth. We did not want to make Wellsville again if we could possibly help it, for fear we would run into Margery's uncle.

That ride to Rochester was more like a bad dream than anything else. As I have said, we were not on the main automobile road, and we soon got into such ruts and mud holes as I have never seen. In places the road was strewn with stones and we were nearly shaken to pieces going over them. It was not long before we came to a sound asleep little townlet, but we didn't have the heart to wake it up and ask it its name, so we went on to the next. It was then about six in the morning and a few people were stirring in the main street. We found by inquiry that we were in the town of Byron and that by turning to the west beyond the schoolhouse we would strike a road which eventually led to Rochester. "Eventually" was the right word. It certainly was not "directly". It twisted and turned and ended up in fields; it wound back and forth upon itself like a serpent; it dissolved in places into a lake of mud. We didn't go very fast because we were afraid the wobbly wheel would

wobble off. Hungry as we were we decided to wait until we reached Rochester before getting breakfast, so we could put the car into the repair shop the first thing and save time. We staved off the keenest pangs of hunger by plundering an apple tree that dangled its ripe fruit invitingly over the road, and I haven't tasted anything so delicious before or since as those Wohelo apples, as we named them.

The poor Glow-worm minus the one fender looked like a glow-worm with one wing off and the wobbling wheel gave it a tipsy appearance. Nyoda frowned as she drove; I know she hated the spectacle we made.

"Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a girl drives an auto her trouble begins,"

spouted Sahwah.

"Aren't we nearly there?" sighed Nakwisi, as she came back to the seat after rising to the occasion of a bump.

"Long est via ad Tipperarium", replied Sahwah, and then bit her tongue as we struck a hole in the road.

The morning was beautiful after the foggy night and our spirits soared as we traveled along in the sunshine, singing "Along the Road that Leads the Way". But it was not long before there was a fly in the ointment. Turning around one of the innumerable curves in the road we saw the red roadster proceeding leisurely ahead of us.

CHAPTER V.

As far as we could make out there was only one person in the car and that was the driver, and if he had left the scene of the burning hotel with a girl in a tan suit she was no longer with him. I think Nyoda would have turned aside into some by-road if there had been such a thing in sight, but there wasn't. The Frog turned around in the seat and saw us coming. That action seemed to rouse Nyoda to fury. Two red spots burned in her cheeks and her eyes snapped.

"I'm going to overtake him," she said with a sudden resolution, "and ask him pointblank why he is always following us."

At that she put on speed and went forward as fast as the wobbling wheel would allow. But no sooner had she done this than a surprising thing happened. The Frog looked around again, saw us gaining on him, and then the red roadster shot forward with many times the speed of ours and disappeared around a bend in the road.

"He's running away from us!" exclaimed Sahwah.

"He may be afraid we are going to make it unpleasant for him for stealing the Glow-worm," said Nyoda. "But," she added, "I can't understand why he has ventured near us at all since that episode. You would expect him to put as much space as possible between himself and us."

"He probably didn't know we were following him," said Sahwah, shrewdly.

But the whole conduct of the Frog since the beginning was such a puzzle that we could make neither head nor tail out of it, so we gave it up and turned our attention to the scenery. Behind us a motorcycle was chugging along with a noise all out of proportion to the size of the vehicle, and we amused ourselves by wondering what would happen if it should try to pass us on the narrow road, with a sharp drop into a small lake on one side and a swamp on the other. But the rider evidently had more caution than we generally credit to motorcyclists and made no attempt to pass us, so we were not treated to the spectacle of a man and a motorcycle turning a somersault into the lake or sprawling in the marsh.

We certainly were ready for our long delayed breakfast when we finally got to Rochester, after giving the Glow-worm into the hands of the doctor once more. The poor Glow-worm! She never had such a strenuous trip before or after. The man on the motorcycle came into the repair shop while we were there to have something done to his engine, and he listened with interest while we were telling the repair man how we had run into the limousine in the fog. He looked at Margery curiously and I wonder if he noticed that her suit did not fit her by several inches. But Nyoda says men are not very observant about such things.

He was a good-looking, light-haired young man, and he stared at us with a frank interest that could not be called impertinent. I believe there is a sort of freemasonry between motor tourists, especially when they are having motor troubles, that makes it seem perfectly all right to talk to strangers. When the young man asked where we were from and where we were going we answered politely that we were on our way to Chicago by way of Plymouth and LaPorte. (We had decided not to go to South Bend at all, as it was out of the way of the route we were now traveling.) Nyoda added that we hoped to make Chicago before night. Here Sahwah advised her to rap on wood. We had planned to make it before nightfall once before. When we told about the fire the young man agreed that we certainly had had adventures a-plenty. He ended up by telling us a good restaurant where we could get breakfast (he evidently had been in town before) and we hastened to find it, leaving him explaining to the repairman what was the matter with his motorcycle.

While we were eating breakfast we saw him pass on the opposite side of the street and enter a building which bore the sign of the telegraph company. I couldn't help wishing that we knew his name and would meet him again on the trip, he seemed such a pleasant chap. I am always on the lookout for romantic possibilities in everything.

The Glow-worm was to be ready to appear in polite society sometime in the afternoon and we had nothing to do but kill time until then. There were no picture shows open in the morning so the only thing left for us to do was to go for a walk through the town. It was terribly hot, nearly ninety in the shade, and what it was out in the sun we could only surmise. Margery wanted to keep her veil down because she was afraid of meeting people, and Sahwah thought it would appear strange if only she were veiled and suggested that we all keep ours down, but they nearly stifled us. So we compromised on wearing the tinted driving goggles, which really were a relief from the glare of the sun, even if they did look affected on the street, as Nakwisi said. I'm afraid we didn't have our usual blithe spirit of Joyous Venture, as we walked up

and down the streets of the town, looking, as Sahwah said, "for something to look at". The frequency with which the Glow-worm was being laid up for repairs was beginning to get on our nerves. Sahwah remarked that if we had set out to walk to Chicago we would have been there long ago, and that the rate at which we were progressing reminded her of that gymnasium exercise known as "running in place", where you use up enough energy to cross the county and are just as tired as if you had gone that far, while in reality you haven't gotten away from the spot.

Nakwisi stood up on a little rise of ground and focused her spy-glass in the direction of Chicago and said she had better try to get a look at the Forbidden City from there because she might never get any nearer.

Nyoda had torn her green veil on her hatpin and the wind had whipped the loose ends out until they looked ragged and she was frankly cross.

"When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And learns too late that veils do fray--"

chanted Sahwah, trying to be funny, but no one even laughed at her. We were too much exhausted from the heat and too busy wiping the perspiration out of our eyes.

As a town of that size must necessarily come to an end soon, we found ourselves after a while, beyond its limits and on a country road. We saw a great tree spreading out its shady branches at no great distance and made for it. With various sighs and puffs of satisfaction we sank down in the grass and made ourselves comfortable. Of all the sights we had seen so far on our trip the sight of that tree gave us the most pleasure. We had not sat there very long when a young man passed us in the road. He was the light-haired young man we had seen in the repair shop. He lifted his hat as he passed but he did not say anything. He was on foot, from which we judged that he also had some time to kill while his motorcycle was being fixed.

We did not sit long under that tree after all. First, Sahwah discovered that she was sitting next to a convention hall of gigantic red ants and a number of the delegates had gone on sight-seeing excursions up her sleeves and into her low shoes, which naturally caused some commotion. Then a spider let himself down on a web directly in front of Margery's face and threw her into hysterics. And then the mosquitoes descended, the way the Latin book says the Roman soldiers did, "as many thousands as ever came down from old Mycaenae", and after that there was no peace. We slapped them away with leaves for a time but there were too many for us, so in sheer self-defense, we got up and began to walk back to town. The only thing we had to be thankful for so far was that the Frog had apparently vanished from the scene.

We went back to the little restaurant where we had eaten our breakfast and ordered dinner. We had our choice between boiled fish and fried steak and we all took steak except Margery, who wanted fish. The heat had taken away our appetites, all but Margery's, and she ate heartily. Dinner over, we went out into the heat once more. We went up to see if the picture show was open yet, for the thought of a comfortable seat away from the sun and with an electric fan near, was becoming more alluring every minute. It was open and we passed in with sighs of joy. Somewhere along the middle of the performance, Sahwah, who was sitting next to me, gave me a nudge and pointed to the other side of the house.

There sat the Frog, as big as life.

"I should think he'd smother in those goggles," whispered Sahwah.

At the same time Nakwisi, who was on the other side of me, also nudged me and told me to look around a few minutes later so it wouldn't look as if she had called my attention. After a short interval I looked.

There sat the motorcyclist directly behind us. How I did wish we could tell him about the Frog and how he was always following us around, why, we could not guess.

Before the picture was finished Nyoda thought it was time to go and get the Glow-worm, which should be finished by that time. But when we got out into the sun again Margery began to feel dizzy and sick. We were perplexed what to do. This little country town was not like the big city where there are rest rooms in every big store. We finally decided to get a room at the hotel, which was near-by. But here as everywhere, that miserable Jinx had raised an obstacle against us. There was a rural church conference going on in town that week and, of course, the hotel was filled to overflowing. Delegates with white and gold badges were standing around everywhere and there was not a room to be had.

Margery sat down in the parlor awhile and then said she felt somewhat better, but she still looked so white that Nyoda refused to set out with her in the car. As in S---, the clerk gave us the name of a woman near-by who would let us have a room if we wanted it, and after a while we went up there. We wanted Margery to lie down on a bed for a while. But no sooner were we there than she was taken with terrible pains. Thoroughly alarmed, Nyoda went across the street where a doctor's sign swung on a post before a house and brought him over. Margery was very ill by this time and the doctor said she had symptoms of ptomaine poisoning. He asked what she had eaten for dinner. At the mention of fish he nodded his head gravely. Eating fish with the thermometer at ninety-five degrees is a somewhat hazardous proceeding, he remarked. How glad we all were then that we had taken the steak, even if it was tough! The doctor gave Margery some medicine and said we needn't worry because she wouldn't get any worse, and left us with a few more remarks about eating fish in a restaurant in hot weather.

Margery was more distressed about having delayed our start than she was over her own discomfort, so we had to make light of it, even though we were dismayed ourselves. Now the Glow-worm was ready and we were not! I couldn't help feeling that it had been no ordinary fish from the near-by lake that Margery had eaten, but one of the fateful fishes of the zodiac itself, especially prepared for the occasion. For it soon became evident that we could not leave town that night. Margery was feeling better, but was still too weak for automobile traveling.

Nyoda knit her brows for some time. "I'll have to wire Chicago," she said, thoughtfully. Gladys and the others must be there by this time.

I walked over to the telegraph office with her and stood beside her while she wrote the message: "Held in Rochester to-night on account sickness. Address Forty-three Main Street." She directed it to Gladys at the Carrie Wentworth Inn, the new Women's Hotel where we were to stay in Chicago. She read it out loud to me, counting over the words. As we turned away from the window-desk someone turned and went out just ahead of us. It was the motorcyclist.

Margery was sleeping when we returned, and we sat down beside the bed and read the paper we had bought at the corner stand. Nyoda gave a smothered exclamation as she read and pointed to an article which said that both Margery Anderson's father and uncle were scouring the country for her, and the uncle was accusing the father of having spirited her away. The paper said that private detectives were trying to trace her. Then it was that we remembered the mysterious reappearance of the Frog. We hadn't much doubt that he was a detective. But if he were a detective, why had he attempted to steal the Glow-worm? The only reason could have been the one which Sahwah suggested, namely, that he wanted to cut us off from following him. He had probably carried away the wrong girl in the excitement of the fire and did not discover his mistake until later and then had let her go. This accounted for the fact that there was no girl in the red roadster when it loomed up ahead of us in the road that morning.

But why had he run away from us when we tried to overtake him? That was a baffling question, and the only way we could explain it was that he was afraid we would accuse him of theft. That he had not gone very far away from us was shown by the way he had appeared in the picture theatre that afternoon. But if he was a detective, why did he not boldly march up to Margery and attempt to take her away from us?

Between the heat and the puzzle we were reduced to a frazzle. We carefully hid the paper so Margery wouldn't see it when she woke up and went down to supper. The house was on a corner and it seemed to me, as I sat at the table that I saw the Frog walking down the side street. But it was growing dark and I was not sure, so I said nothing about it. Margery was very weak when she woke up and still unable to eat anything, and I believe she had a touch of sunstroke along with her ptomaine poisoning. She was clearly not a strong girl. The room seemed stuffy and close and we fanned her to make her feel cooler. But we were still thankful that we were not in the hotel, with its crowd of delegates and its band continually playing.

Sahwah was telling that joke about the man thinking the car was empty, when all the while there was a miss in the motor and a "dutchman" in the back seat, when there came a rap on the door and the lady of the house came in. A minute later we were all looking at each other in bewildered astonishment. _She had asked us to leave the house._

"But we've engaged the rooms for the night," said Nyoda.

That made no difference. We could have our money back. She had changed her mind about letting the rooms.

"You certainly can't think of turning this sick girl out of the house!" exclaimed Nyoda, incredulously.

Mrs. Moffat's face did not change in the least. She looked from one to the other of us with a steely glitter in her eye, which was a great change from the professional hospitality of her manner when she had let the rooms. "People aren't always as sick as they make folks believe," she said, sourly.

"You certainly don't doubt that this girl is sick!" said Nyoda, in desperation.

"I'm not saying I doubt anything," replied Mrs. Moffat. "I said I

didn't want you to have the rooms to-night and I meant it."

"Will you please come outside and explain yourself," said Nyoda, "where it won't excite this sick girl?"

They went down-stairs to the lower hall, where Nyoda argued and pleaded to be told the meaning of Mrs. Moffat's strange attitude toward us, but she got no satisfaction. Mrs. Moffat would say nothing more than that she had a reputation to keep up. When Nyoda defied her to put Margery out Mrs. Moffat said grandiloquently that her son was on the police force (I suppose she meant he was _the_ police force) and we would see what she could do.

Nyoda, at her wit's end, was trying to think of what to say next when there was a rap on the door and a small boy arrived with a note, which he would not give into Mrs. Moffat's hand. He just held it up so she could see what was on the outside. It was addressed to "The black-haired automobile lady". This, of course, was Nyoda and the boy was perfectly satisfied to give her the note once he had looked at her. Wonderingly she unfolded it. It contained only one line: "Go 22 Spring Street." It was signed "A fellow tourist." Nyoda turned to ask the boy who had given him the note, but he had disappeared.

22 Spring Street. Spring Street was one block down Main Street. Nyoda called me to go with her and we went to 22 Spring Street. A perfectly dear old lady came to the door and, when we asked if she could keep us all night, she said she would be delighted to. She asked such few questions that I have a suspicion that she knew all about us already from the motorcyclist, for we had no doubt that it was he who had sent Nyoda the note. How he knew Mrs. Moffat was trying to put us out was beyond us, unless he had been passing the open front door and overheard her conversation, which had not been in low tones by any means. As the new place was so near we got Margery over without any trouble and shook the dust of Mrs. Moffat's house from our feet disdainfully, if still completely in the dark as to why it should be so.

What had caused the change in her manner toward us? She had been perfectly cordial at the supper table and asked how we liked the beds. Something had evidently occurred while we sat upstairs, but what it was we could not guess. Then, like a flash, I remembered having seen the Frog sauntering past the house while we were eating supper. Had he gone to Mrs. Moffat with some story about us which had caused her to put us out? It sounded like a moving picture plot, and yet we all realized the possibility of it. We were simply dazed with the events of the day and evening by the time we reached the new rooms and had put Margery to bed.

"What a record we are setting this week!" said Sahwah. "First night we wandered into a Congressman's house by mistake and were put out; second night we got burned out of a hotel and finished by getting lost in the fog; third night we are put out of a lodging house for some mysterious reason. There aren't enough more things that can happen to us to last the week out." Which showed all that Sahwah knew about it.

When we had simmered down to something near normal again we realized that we would need the trunk which was carried on the Glow-worm. Nyoda drove the Glow-worm over and we carried the trunk up-stairs while she ran the car back to the garage. It was heavier than we expected and we were pretty well winded when we set it down on the floor of our room.

"Won't I be glad to see my dressing-gown again," said Sahwah, sucking her thumb, which had gotten under the trunk when it was set down. "This dress shrank when it got drenched in the fog last night and the collar's too tight."

"Slippers are what appeal to me," I sighed, wishing Nyoda would hurry back with the key. My shoes had been soaked in mud which had dried and left them stiff, and walking around all day on the scorching sidewalks had about parboiled my feet. Nyoda returned just then and opened the trunk without delay, while we crowded around to seize upon our wished-for belongings as soon as possible.

But when the cover was tilted back we fell over in as much surprise as if a jack-in-the-box had sprung out at us. Instead of Sahwah's red dressing-gown on top as we had expected there were rows and rows of bottles. We stared stupidly, not knowing whether to believe our eyes or not.

"You've got the wrong trunk!" we cried to Nyoda.

Nyoda went post-haste back to the garage. When she came back she wore a puzzled look. "The garage man declares that was the trunk that came with the Glow-worm," she said, in a dazed voice. "He says it was never removed from the rack, as all the work was on the front wheel and front fender."

Sahwah took one of the bottles from the trunk and held it up. It contained some fluid guaranteed to make the hair stay in curl in the dampest weather. There was a bright yellow label halfway around it that bore the classic slogan, "One touch of Curline makes the whole world kink." Sahwah began to giggle hysterically. At any other time we would all have laughed heartily over that ridiculous trademark, but just now we were too much concerned with the loss of our things to feel like laughing.

"No wonder the trunk was so heavy," said Sahwah, rubbing her arms at the remembrance of that climb up the stairs.

We searched our memories for the events of the previous day and tried to remember just where the trunk had been all the while. Then we remembered the scene of the fire and the fact that the Glow-worm might have been unguarded for some time in the garage. The trunk had been taken off the rack the day before when the repairs were made, because they had some work to do on the tail lamp bracket, and I heard the man say the trunk was in the way. This trunk with the bottles was the same on the outside as ours with the exception of Gladys's initials, and it might have been put onto the rack of the Glow-worm by mistake when the repairs were finished.

Nyoda lost no time in getting the proprietor of the garage at Wellsville on the long distance phone. When she returned this time she was entirely cheerful again. "He says there's another trunk just like it in the garage," she said. "He didn't know whom it belonged to. I told him to send it to us by express and it will be here in the morning. We will send this one back to him, for the rightful owner will be coming back after it."

"Whatever would anyone want with a trunkful of this stuff?" asked Sahwah,

curiously.

"Probably a traveling salesman," suggested Nyoda. She took the bottle from Sahwah's hand and put it back into its place in the trunk. "One touch of Curline makes the whole world kink," she mused. "Well, 'one touch of Curline' has put a 'kink' in our retiring arrangements, all right."

She locked up the trunk with our key, which fitted the lock perfectly, remarking as she did so that locks weren't quite as useful as they might be, since other people's keys fitted them. The rest of the night passed peacefully, and we were so tired out from having had scarcely any sleep the previous night that we sank to slumber as soon as we touched the pillows.

In the morning we took the stranger's trunk to the express office and called for ours. We hailed that six-sided thing of boards and leather as though it had been a long lost friend and cheered it lustily when it was set down in our room. We could easily see where the garage man had made the mistake in giving us the salesman's trunk, for the two were identical. We opened ours up to see if our belongings were still intact. It took us a few minutes to realize the import of what we found. There, apparently, was our trunk, but the things in it were not ours. _They belonged to the other girls. _There was Gladys's pink silk crepe kimono; and Hinpoha's blue one; there were Gladys's Turkish slippers with the turned up toes; there were Hinpoha's stockings, plainly marked with her name.

We stared at each other with something like fear in our eyes. The thing was so uncanny. Gladys's trunk had not been in the garage when we arrived; it must have come after we left; and yet, _the Striped Beetle had gone on to Chicago ahead of us_!

The thing was monstrous; incredible. Had the fairies been playing tricks on us? We stood gazing with fascinated eyes at the open trunk which stood in our midst like a silent portent.

CHAPTER VI.

For the second time Nyoda got the garage man at Wellsville on the long distance phone. This conference only deepened the puzzle. He declared solemnly that no car even remotely resembling the Striped Beetle had been in his establishment and no party of girls such as we described. He was as much in the dark as we were about the trunk. Had we been carrying Gladys's trunk ever since we left home? we asked ourselves. No, for we had opened ours several times on the road. We gave it up when the puzzle threatened to addle our brains, and prepared to start away on our journey. Margery felt well again and ready to travel. We were standing in the street around the Glow-worm, and through gaps between houses we could see Mrs. Moffat's house down on Main Street. We saw a boy in the uniform of a telegraph messenger come along Main Street and stop at her house.

"Maybe the Frog's sending her some more mysterious messages," said Sahwah, idly.

But in a moment the boy ran down the steps again and retraced his steps up Main Street. As he passed the street where we were he looked down, and then he came toward us. "Which one is Miss Elizabeth Kent?" he asked.

Nyoda stepped forward and he handed her the telegraph envelope. Nyoda tore it open and a look of blank astonishment came over her face as she read.

"What is it?" we all chorused.

"Read it," she said.

This is what we read: "Where on earth are you? Wait Rochester for us. Coming to-day noon. Gladys."

It was sent from Indianapolis!

We looked at each other dazedly. Gladys in Indianapolis? What was she doing there? Indianapolis was far out of our way, miles to the south. With the main roads marked as they were it was impossible for her to have gotten lost. Then on the heels of this question came another one; if Gladys had gotten side-tracked and had fallen behind us on the road, who had passed ahead of us along the northern route to Chicago whom we had been blindly following? How had Gladys in Indianapolis received the telegram we had sent to Chicago, giving our address in Rochester? If Gladys had not come along the northern route, how came her trunk to be in Wellsville? It was a Chinese puzzle no matter which way you looked at it, and as Sawwah remarked, not being Chinamen we had no clue. But we sighed with relief at the thought that Gladys and the rest would be with us at noon and the mystery would all come to an end. Till noon then, we would possess our souls in patience.

To kill time we decided to look around at some of the stores. To the city bred the small town store is as much of a curiosity as the big city store is to the country bred. Most people think that the department store is a product of the big city, but I think it is a development of the general store of the country town. We found a place where they sold everything from handkerchiefs to plows, and wandered about happily, looking at farm implements whose use we did not even guess, and wonderful displays of crockery and printed calico. We seemed to create quite a sensation when we came in although there were other people in the store. The proprietor came forward hurriedly and asked us what we wanted. A strange look came into his face when we said we just came in to look around. He and his wife and the two or three clerks in the place all looked at each other, but they said no more. But as we moved up one aisle and down another he was always right at our elbow, and he never seemed to take his eyes from us. I picked up a pile of handkerchiefs to look them over, thinking I might buy some, as mine were in the lost trunk nobody knew where, but they were all cotton and I despise cotton handkerchiefs. As I put them down again and passed on I saw the proprietor pick them up and although he turned his back to us I could see that he was counting them.

We became conscious of a chill in the air. It seemed that everybody in the place was watching us with suspicious eyes. With one accord we moved toward the door and stepped out into the street, where we faced each other questioningly. What was this baffling thing that we were

running up against of late? The people around here seemed to know something about us which we did not know ourselves. Last night our landlady for no satisfactory reason had put us out of her house, and here were the store people plainly suspicious of us. Was Margery the cause of it? She had not come with us this morning, as she thought it would be wiser to stay in her room. But even if they knew about Margery we would hardly have expected them to act this way. Why did they make no attempt to take her away from us?

Everywhere we turned we came against a wall of mystery. Was the Frog at the bottom of it? But why did he always loiter in the background and never openly molest us? There was something more terrifying about this silent, skulking foe than there would have been about an armed highwayman. So far to-day he had not appeared, but we did not doubt that he was lurking in the shadows somewhere. As we stood there we saw the motorcyclist walking down from the upper end of the street in our direction.

"Let's wait until he comes up and thank him for telling us about the other rooms," suggested Sahwah.

So we stood still and waited. But no sooner had he seen us standing there on the sidewalk than he paused suddenly, turned abruptly and went up a side street.

"Even he is avoiding us!" said Sahwah. "What on earth can be the reason?"

We wished with all our hearts for noon, when Gladys would come and we could get out of this wretched town. But there were still two hours until then. We decided to go into another store and see if they would treat us the same way. They did, only perhaps a little more so. The proprietor followed us around like a shadow and heaved an audible sigh of relief when we went out. Utterly disgusted, we went back to Margery. The time passed heavily until noon and then we went out on Main Street to watch for the arrival of the Striped Beetle. The events and accidents we were ready to pour out to the coming girls were enough to fill a volume, and we were sure that nothing they would have to tell would match our story of the fire and the night in the fog.

The telegram had said they would come at noon and we were to wait for them. Noon came and went; one o'clock; two o'clock; and like the Blue Alsatian Mountains, we were still watching and waiting. There was no sign of the Striped Beetle. The sun beat down mercilessly on the glaring earth and we grew faint and dizzy straining our eyes up the road. It was several degrees hotter than the day before. We ate our dinner in squads, one squad eating while the other did sentinel duty. We beguiled the time by singing "Wait for the Wagon", "Waiting at the Church", and every other song we knew on the subject. People looked at us curiously as we sat in a row on a low stone wall. One man asked us if we were waiting for the circus parade, because if we were we had our dates mixed; the circus was not due until the next day. The afternoon advanced; careful after careful of tourists came down the dusty road, but none of them the ones we so eagerly awaited. Margery had refused to sit there where everyone could see her, and stayed in her room, and we took turns sitting with her.

"Are you sure we didn't dream that telegram?" asked Sahwah wearily, at half past three.

Nyoda shook her head. "It's real, all right," she answered. "I have it here in my coat pocket."

"Let me see it again," said Sahwah, "and see at what time it was sent."

Nyoda put her hand into her pocket. When she brought it out again she held to the light, not the yellow telegraph form, but a queer, bluish beetle-like thing. She stared at it with amazed eyes and we were all too much astonished to speak.

"What is it?" asked Sahwah, finding her voice first.

"It's a scarab," answered Nyoda, "the ancient Egyptian figure of a beetle. There are several in the museum at home."

We passed it from hand to hand with growing wonder and admiration. But how came it into Nyoda's coat pocket? Was this also a part of the witchcraft that had sent Gladys's trunk to us so mysteriously?

"Curiouser and Curiouser," said Sahwah.

"Are you sure you didn't pick it up somewhere without knowing it?" I asked. "People sometimes do those things absent-mindedly, you know. I came home from down-town once with a gold-handled umbrella and I hadn't the slightest notion of where I got it. And the next day there was a notice in the paper, 'Will the young lady who took the gold-handled umbrella from the wash-room of Levy & Strauss's yesterday afternoon please return same to the office? She was recognized and followed.' And I couldn't remember being in the wash-room of Levy & Strauss's at all!"

Nyoda racked her brain. "It's impossible," she said. "I haven't been anywhere since noon but up to that restaurant and Sahwah and I sat alone at a table. There wasn't anything belonging to anyone else near us."

"You didn't get it this morning when we were looking through the stores?" I asked.

"No," said Nyoda, "I didn't. It wasn't there when I started up to dinner. Besides," she added, "that scarab never came from a store in this town. Things like that are handled by dealers in curios in large cities, and by private collectors." Her brow was puckered into a bewildered frown.

"However it got there," she said, "it doesn't belong there and I have no right to keep it. I'm going to turn it over to the police, and if anybody reports the loss to them they will find it intact."

As we stood there looking at the curious scarab in Nyoda's hands a motorcycle putt-putted past in a cloud of dust and we recognized our light-haired friend apparently leaving town.

"We'll never get a chance to thank him for that address!" I said, half regretfully. Little did we think that the only decent thing fate did for us on that trip was to withhold that chance!

Nyoda and I went in search of the police station, leaving Sahwah and Nakwisi sitting and watching for the Striped Beetle. It was only Sahwah

who was doing any watching out, however, for Nakwisi was looking through her spy-glass at the clouds. After some inquiry we found the police station. When Nyoda told her story about finding the scarab in her pocket, the policeman in charge looked at her with a peculiar expression and a wise grin. But when she wanted to leave it there he waved her away.

"Wouldn't have it around here for a farm," he declared. "Lady left a necklace here once: said she found it in the road. The next night the police station burned down and the necklace disappeared. We just got this new station and it nearly broke the town and we can't have any more accidents. You take it on to the next town and tell 'em you didn't find it till you got there, see?" Half angry and half amused at this dauntless representative of the law we went back to the girls, with the mysterious scarab still in the pocket of Nyoda's coat. If only we had followed Sahwah's joking advice and stuck it on an ornamental shrub near us to startle passers-by and left it there!

"Something must have happened to the Striped Beetle," said Nyoda in a worried way, when we had exhausted our patience with waiting. "I don't know but what it would be a good idea to set out in the direction of Indianapolis and try to find them. We will surely come upon a trace of them somewhere."

"What strikes me queer," said Sahwah, "is, if Gladys knows our address and wired that she would be here at noon, why she didn't wire again when she found she couldn't get here. She might know we would begin to tear our hair when she didn't appear."

Nyoda began to look uneasy. "That's what makes me think something has happened to her," she said. "Somehow I always have visions of the Striped Beetle lying smashed up somewhere and our girls being carried to a hospital. I can't get it out of my mind. Something has happened to Gladys which has kept her from wiring and it is our duty to find out what it is."

"Maybe she did wire and they didn't deliver it to us," suggested Sahwah. Nyoda and I promptly went up to the telegraph office and inquired if any later message had come for us. Nothing had, we were told.

Nyoda made up her mind at once. She consulted the road map she had bought after the marked one had gone with Gladys and looked at the route to Indianapolis. "If any message comes to this office for us, kindly forward it to the office at Kokomo," she directed. "We will stop there and inquire."

We got into the Glow-worm without delay, picked up Margery from the house, piled the other girls into the car and shook the dust of Rochester (it was nearly a foot thick) from our tires. I looked around every little while from my seat in the tonneau to see if the Frog was following us, but there was no sign of him. In fact, I may as well tell you now, that we had seen the last of him until we saw him in such an amazing attitude two days later.

Driving gave us a little relief from the heat, for the motion of the car created a little breeze, although there was none of any other kind stirring. I think if we had sat out in that hot street any longer I should have been overcome. It was bad enough in the car, for the dust

rose up in choking whirls until we could taste it. I have never known such a hot day before or since, although I have seen the thermometer higher; but that day the air seemed to be minus its breathing qualities and we gasped like fish out of water. We kept a close watch on Margery for signs of collapse, but she seemed to be bearing up pretty well; I suppose it was because she had not been sitting out on Main Street for four hours.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we had a thunder shower to-night," said Nyoda, scanning a bank of apoplectic-looking clouds that were lying low over the distant horizon.

"I hope so," I replied. "Anything to break this heat. The air over the street looks like the heat waves over the radiator." I could not help wishing fervently that Gladys had chosen a cool breezy day to get lost on.

We stopped at so many places and asked if they had seen a brown car with black stripes carrying four girls in tan suits that our voices became husky on those words. Sahwah suggested that we print our inquiry on a pennant and fasten it across the front of the car. But nowhere was there a sign or a trace of the car for which we were seeking. People had seen brown cars, but no girls in them, and they had seen tan coats in black or red cars, but nowhere was the tan and brown in combination.

Looking for a needle in a haystack has several advantages over looking for an automobile on a hundred mile stretch of road. For one thing, there is only one haystack, so you are pretty sure of finding your needle there if you look long enough; whereas there were several roads to Indianapolis; and for another thing, your needle is stationary and not traveling through the haystack, so you are reasonably sure when you have ascertained that it is not in a certain part of the haystack that it will not be there at a later time; whereas the Striped Beetle might be moving from place to place, in which case we were going to have a lively time catching up with it.

Especially did we inquire if there had been any accidents. Once we had a scare; we were told that a brown car had been struck by a suburban car that morning and several girls seriously injured. The injured ones had been taken to a hospital in Indianapolis, but the automobile was in a repair shop in the village of D----. We hastened to D---- and elbowed our way through the crowd in front of the repair shop to see the wreck of the car and sighed with relief when we saw it was not the Striped Beetle. One door was still intact and that bore the monogram DPS in large block letters.

If Fate has anything to do with the color of paint, or rather, if the color of paint has anything to do with Fate, brown must be an unlucky shade to paint a car. The number of brown cars which had come to grief along that road was unbelievable. In another place one had turned turtle on a bridge and thrown its passengers into the river beneath, but those passengers were all men, we were told, and we did not stop to investigate further. One woman told a story of having seen four girls walking along the road almost frantic because their car had been stolen while they got out to look at something in a field, and we thought these might possibly be our girls. Hinpoha is crazy about calves and if she saw a calf in a field she would not only go over and pet it herself, but drag all the others along too. When asked to describe their dresses the woman said vaguely that they had had on some light

kind of coats or suits, she couldn't remember which, and she wasn't sure about the veils. They might have been green for all she knew, but she always had been color blind and hated to make a definite statement because she had been fooled on more than one occasion. Where the girls were now she did not know; she thought they were walking to the nearest town to notify the police.

While there was nothing definite about this information it was just enough to tantalize us, and we wondered if the Striped Beetle really had been stolen and the girls were wandering about in distress. We strained our imaginations trying to picture what had happened to Gladys that she did not appear in Rochester, and conjured up all sorts of circumstances to account for it. But I doubt if an imagination as rich as the mine of Ophir could have guessed at the truth, so I don't see how we can be blamed for missing it entirely.

The clouds that had been reclining along the horizon all afternoon began to mount and deepen in color, and the occasional mutterings of thunder became more frequent. From being oppressive the air became stifling and we were all on the verge of collapse. The fatigue of getting out of the car so often to follow up things that looked like clues was beginning to tell on us. And the suspense was worse than anything else. Up to now, when we thought that Gladys was on the road ahead of us and we would catch up with her in Chicago, we had cheerfully put up with all the mishaps which had befallen us, for none of them turned out seriously and we were entirely light-hearted. But now we were really worried about Gladys. Her not appearing after she had wired us that she was coming began to take on a sinister meaning. It is much easier to live through mishaps yourself than imagine them happening to someone else.

Taken altogether, that afternoon's trip is one on which I like to put the soft pedal when harking back in memory. And happy for us then that we did not know what it was going to end in. The sky behind us had turned inky black and it became evident that the storm which was coming would be no ordinary one. A wind sprang up that increased in velocity with a peculiar moaning sound. A strange light was in the air that made the white farm houses and barns gleam sharply against the dark sky. Nyoda looked with some anxiety at the lowering clouds.

"I think it would be a wise plan to make the next town before that storm breaks loose," she observed, thoughtfully. "You know the storm curtains don't fasten tightly on the one side, and if we're caught we're going to be drenched."

The next town was Kokomo, about ten miles away, where we were to stop at the telegraph office and see if there was a message from Gladys. Then began a race the like of which I have never seen before. It was the speed of man matched against the speed of the storm gods. Behind us the storm was breaking; we could see the grey wall of the rain in the distance; the wind was rising to a tornado and the thunder claps seemed to split the earth open. And there we were, scudding along before it, like a tiny craft fleeing from a tidal wave. The Glow-worm bore us onward like a gallant steed, and I compared our headlong flight with the King of Denmark's ride when his Rose of the Isles lay dying.

"Think of something cheerful," said Sahwah, crossly; "Gladys isn't lying at the point of death."

After all, the comparison didn't hold good, for the King's steed reached his destination and the Glow-worm didn't. We had been so taken up with our search for Gladys that we had neglected to supply the life blood to our iron steed, namely, gasoline, and we came to a dead stop in the road four or five miles from town. Our exclamations of disgust were still hovering in the air when the storm struck us. As Sahwah has always described it, "And then the water came down at Lodore." I could devote several pages to the fury of that rainfall, but what is the use of taking up the reader's time when her own imagination will supply the details? Just imagine the worst storm you were ever caught in, or ever saw anyone else caught in, and multiply it by two or three times and you have our situation.

With a shriek of delight the wind seized the loose end of the storm curtain and tore the whole curtain from the car with one neat pull. When we last saw that storm curtain it was traveling eastward at the rate of sixty miles an hour. In one minute we were all as wet as if we had fallen off the dock at home. We abandoned the car and ran for the shelter of a big tree near-by. We were no sooner under its spreading branches when, with a sound like the crack of doom, lightning struck it and it went crashing to earth in the opposite direction from us. We didn't stop to reflect what would have happened to us if it had fallen in our direction, but made for the open road where there was nothing but the sky to fall on us, which it was doing as hard as it could.

We were just wondering how long it would take the inside of the Glow-worm to dry out, and whether rain made spots on the leather when a closed limousine came along the road. The driver, in rubber coat and cap, stopped his car and asked if he could be of assistance. Nyoda, suddenly conscious that the color was running out of her dripping veil all over her face, put her hand in her pocket to find her handkerchief and wipe her face. Along with the handkerchief out fell the curious scarab which we had forgotten in the search for Gladys. The man eyed it intently as Nyoda put it back into her pocket. A change seemed to have come over him. Before he was merely an automobile driver offering help to a stranded motorist, but now he acted like a minion in the presence of a queen. He touched his hat with the greatest respect, got down from his seat in a hurry and opened the door of the limousine.

"Get in quickly," he said, and we did, glad of the glass enclosed shelter from the downpour. With deft motions he fastened the Glow-worm behind the limousine with a tow line and then sent his car rolling down the road at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER VII.

We had not proceeded very far up the road when the car turned into a long winding driveway of gravel, bordered on either side by well kept lawns and trim trees. We could see that much through the windows of the car when the rain would cease its furious whirling against the glass for a moment. Soon we came to a stop under a wide sheltering porte-cochere, and the driver got down and opened the door ceremoniously. It was quite dark, but we could see that the house at which we had stopped was an immense mansion, probably the country home of some millionaire.

"I will see that the tanks are filled in good time," said the chauffeur, touching his hand to his cap. He had been driving without gloves, and I noticed that the little finger on both of his hands was turned inward at the second joint. I believe that is what brother Tom calls a baseball finger.

Just then the door of the house opened and a trim looking maid appeared and greeted the chauffeur familiarly as "Heinie". He replied by a wink and a series of movements with his eyebrows which threw the maid into a spasm of amusement. Then he started the limousine, with the Glow-worm still in tow, around the side of the house, presumably toward the garage, although from where we stood we saw no building. The maid held the door open for us and we stepped into an entry paved with marble.

"If we could stay here a few minutes until the rain is over--" began Nyoda. For no reason at all the maid began to giggle violently. I suppose she was still amused over the grimaces of the chauffeur. It takes so little to amuse some people.

"Come this way," she said, and led the way from the entry into a hall and up a flight of stairs. There was a big triple window on the landing and as we passed the rain was dashing against it so violently that we thought the glass must give way. Severe as the storm had been when we were caught in it, it was twice as bad now, and we gave a thankful sigh that we were under shelter, and blessed the gasoline for giving out when it did, for if it hadn't we must have been overtaken on the road and would have missed this chance of getting in the dry. We went upstairs as quickly as possible so as not to drip on the rich carpet that covered the steps. The maid threw open the door into the most luxurious bedchamber I have ever seen. It was clear that we were in the house of a very wealthy man. Another maid was in the room which we entered and she looked at us five dripping refugees with a stare of curiosity.

"Some friends who were caught in the rain," explained the maid who had acted as our guide. "Come, get them some dry clothes."

The two of them bustled about laying out things for us to put on, and for the first time in my life I was waited on by a maid. The first one, whom the other addressed as Carrie, was inclined to be talkative, and sympathized noisily with our drenched state. She was quite pretty, with rosy cheeks and black hair and black eyes. There was something odd about her appearance at first and upon looking at her closely I discovered this odd appearance came from the fact that her eyes did not seem to be on a level. But she was very deft in her movements and had our wet garments hung up on hangers and spread out before the little grate fire in no time. I felt a passing envy for the woman who was the mistress of this maid and who did not have to worry whether she threw her clothes in a heap on the floor or not, as she would always find them properly taken care of when she wanted them again. Taking care of my clothes is the greatest trial of my life.

The other maid spoke not at all; she seemed newer at her job and obeyed the directions of the first meekly and in silence. Carrie picked up Nyoda's soaked coat and shook it, and as she did so the scarab flew out of the pocket and fell to the floor. She hastily picked it up and held it in her hand for an instant, turning it over and looking at it curiously. I saw her glance sidewise at Agnes, the other maid, who stood with her back to us putting Nyoda's shoes onto trees; then she looked boldly at Nyoda and deliberately winked one eye! Nyoda looked at

her with a puzzled frown. Carrie became all meekness and deference in a moment; she laid the scarab down on the table beside Nyoda's purse and went about her duties without raising her eyes.

In a moment she left the room and we sat listening to the rain beating against the panes and wondering when it would stop and how soon our clothes would be dry so we could resume our journey. Agnes went out presently and when she came back she carried a tray full of cups of steaming broth and a plate of sandwiches. We were very thankful for this favor, as we were beginning to feel chilled through. Getting drenched that way when we were so hot was bad enough, but the wind that accompanied the shower was decidedly cool and we were pretty uncomfortable by the time we were picked up.

"To whom are we indebted for this hospitality?" asked Nyoda of Agnes.

"Ma'm?" said Agnes.

"In whose house are we?" asked Nyoda.

"This is the home of Simon McClure," answered Agnes.

"Oh-oh!" we said altogether. The name of Simon McClure was a household word with us. It was his yacht that had sprung a leak and gone down the summer before just as it was on the point of winning the cup race. We had all heard about this millionaire sportsman and his horses, dogs and boats. Well, we were not sorry, after all, that the heat had ended up in a shower. It was worth a drenching to be taken into such a house. I'm afraid our anxiety about Gladys faded a little in the enjoyment of our unique position. The rain had gradually subsided from a cloudburst into a steady downpour and we trembled to think what the road would be like. In our mind's eye we saw ourselves stuck up to the hubs in yellow clay from which it would require the pulling power of a locomotive to release us.

I suppose Carrie must have told her mistress of our presence, for after one of her absences from the room she said that Mrs. McClure had said we were welcome to stay all night if we wished. We looked at each other with rather comical expressions. To our widely varying list of night's lodgings there was about to be added one more, as different from the rest as they had been from each other. One more adventure was to be added to our already long list! But even then we did not guess that this one was to surpass all the others as the glare of a rocket outshines the glimmer of a match!

Carrie returned again presently and after looking at Agnes steadily for a minute, with a peculiar expression in her black eyes she turned to Nyoda and said respectfully that Mrs. McClure was giving a fancy dress ball that night and, as several of the invited guests had been prevented from coming at the last moment, which would spoil the number for a certain march figure she had planned, she wanted to know if we would mind attending the ball in their places. She begged us to excuse her for not coming in to speak to us herself, but she was in the hands of her hair-dresser.

Would we mind attending the ball! Did things ever happen to other people the way they happened to us? And such a ball as the McClures would give would be like a page out of the Arabian Nights to us, who knew nothing of high society.

"But what could we wear?" asked Sahwah, always the first to come to earth and see the practical side of the question.

Carrie flashed her a sparkling look from her black eyes, giggled, and then shifted her gaze to Agnes, whom she watched narrowly. Agnes looked indifferent, both at her and at us. The stony expression on Agnes's face began to puzzle me; I wondered if there was any mystery about her. Carrie finally took her eyes from Agnes's face and allowed them to travel around the room to where our touring suits hung up to dry. "The automobile suits," she suggested respectfully, "and the veils, and the goggles--You could masque as a party of tourists. The clothes are quite dry."

Our spirits revived again, for the thought that we might have to miss this grand opportunity of witnessing a gorgeous spectacle because we had nothing to wear had sent our hearts down into our shoes.

Carrie was summoned away then by a soft purring little buzzer and directed Agnes to help us dress. I must say that we made very nice looking tourists in our tan suits and green veils. Agnes had the suits pressed until there were no wrinkles left in them and arranged our veils with a practised hand. All the while we were dressing we could hear automobiles driving up under the porte-cochere, and guests arriving, and we were in a fever of anticipation. Strains of music floated up from below, together with the subdued hum of many voices. We judged from the direction of the sounds that the ballroom was on the first floor.

It was after ten o'clock when we were finally ready and Carrie appeared in the door for us. She took us down another stairway into a vast hall filled with paintings and statuary, where a man in a dark blue suit and silver braid (I suppose that's what you'd call a footman in livery), stood stiffly as the statues around him. Carrie said something to him in a low tone (I presume she was explaining our presence without cards of invitation, such as he was collecting from the other guests), and he looked at us with an impassive eye and nodded his head. He was a very homely man with an exceedingly red nose with one bright blue vein running across it that gave him somewhat of a singular appearance. I remember thinking that if I were his mistress I should set him to working in the garden where nobody could see him, instead of posting him in the front hall to admit the guests.

After Carrie had turned us over to the Nose with the Vein she went upstairs again and the man slid back a door on the left side of the hall. We found ourselves in the ballroom and in the midst of a scene as bewildering as it was gorgeous. Of course, our first thought had been to find our hostess and make ourselves known, but there was no way of telling which one Mrs. McClure was. Everybody was masked and frolicking around and there didn't seem to be anyone doing the duty of a hostess whom we could suspect of being Mrs. McClure. Later on we discovered that there was a reception-room off at the other end of the ballroom where Mrs. McClure had been receiving her guests, but at the time we saw nothing but the shifting masses of light and color around us, that resolved themselves into kings and queens and princes and Indians and turbaned Hindoos and pirates and Turks and peasants and fairies. The orchestra was playing the opening bars of a waltz and the dancers were seeking partners. We withdrew into a corner behind a large palm to look on. To our surprise and somewhat to our embarrassment we were asked to

dance before the waltz was over. My partner was a Scottish highlander and a good dancer, and he evidently thought I belonged in the set who were the guests at this ball, because he kept pointing out different people and asking if I thought they were this one or that one. I did not speak much, however, and do not think he ever guessed that I was not a friend of Mrs. McClure's, was an outsider at the ball, and was, in fact, the mere tourist I was supposed to represent. I thought, however, I might get one piece of information out of him.

"I don't see Mrs. McClure," I said, looking over the dancing couples. Then it was that the Highlander told me about the reception-room at the other side of the conservatory that opened out of the ballroom, where Mrs. McClure was. I mentally thanked him for this piece of information and purposed to tell Nyoda about it as soon as the dance was over. But when that dance came to a close we were claimed by other partners for the next, and so on, and we did not get out of the ballroom.

The memory of that ball is like some queer oriental dream and even while we were in the midst of it I had to pinch myself to make sure that I was awake and the things around me were real. But the events that followed were real enough for anyone to know that they were not dreaming. There came an intermission in the dancing at last, and we five found ourselves in the glassed-in sun parlor opening from the ballroom while somebody was going for ices for us. As it happened we were the only ones in that little room, for the bigger conservatory next to it was a more popular resting-place. Sitting there waiting we began to talk about the scarab and the queer effect it seemed to have had on the chauffeur.

"Let me look at it again," said I. I was utterly fascinated by the thing.

Nyoda put her hand in the pocket of her coat where she had put the scarab for safe keeping, and drew out, not the odd-looking beetle, but something that flashed in the light like a thousand rain-drops in the sunshine. It was a diamond necklace, with a diamond pendant at the end, the stones arranged in the form of a cross. The thing blazed in Nyoda's hand like liquid fire running down over her fingers, and we fairly blinked as we looked at it. We were too astonished to say a word and simply stared at it as if we were hypnotised.

"Girls," said Nyoda in a horrified tone, "there's something queer going on here and we're mixed up in it. The sooner we get out of this house the better. There's a gang of thieves at work at this ball--there usually are at these big affairs--and unless we want to find ourselves drawn into a net from which we can't escape easily we'll have to run for it."

It was a good thing that the sun parlor was empty and the crush around the table where the ices were being served kept our friends from returning. Nyoda put the necklace into a jardinier containing a monstrous fern and we looked around for a way out. We thought we would slip out to the garage and get the Glow-worm. The sun parlor must have had a door leading to the outside, but it was so full of plants in pots and jardiniers that if there was a door it was covered up. We fled back into the conservatory, where couples were sitting all over, but there was no outside door from there. After that we got into a library filled with people playing cards at tables. We were looking anxiously around for a door into the hall which led to the porte-cochere entrance when

we saw the maid Carrie come into the room with a tray full of glasses. When she saw us standing there she came up to us and under the pretense of offering us refreshments she whispered: "You are looking for the way out? Follow me."

We followed her across the room and out the door at the opposite side, which opened into a small reception-room. There stood the footman with the vein in his nose and without a word he led the way through various rooms and hallways to the porte-cochere entrance. We passed out quickly, and to our surprise there stood the Glow-worm under the porte-cochere with the lamps all lighted and the tanks filled. In a moment we were speeding down that driveway again and out into the midnight. The events of the evening were whirling through our heads. As yet we could make neither head nor tail to them. Bit by bit we began to see the significance of things, although, of course, the whole story was not clear to us until a day later, when things came to a head and the resulting explosion cleared up all mysteries.

This much we did understand, however, that someone had stolen a diamond necklace from one of the guests at the ball and expected us to get away with it. Also that the servants must have been in the plot, for how else had our get away been made so easy? And how came the Glow-worm to be standing at the door ready to drive away?

We laughed when we thought of the diamond necklace which they had supposed was safe in our possession, lying in the jardinier in the sun parlor. We fancied the commotion that would take place when the owner discovered its loss, and the equal dismay in the breasts of the conspirators when it was found in the jardinier.

But here we were again, without a place to spend the night, when we had expected to sleep in such luxurious beds. With one accord we decided to drive all night and put as much distance between us and the house as possible. We were constantly afraid that we were being pursued as it was, and strained our ears for the throb of a motor behind us that would tell of the chase. We did not make very fast headway, for the roads were abominable after the storm. In places we went through regular lakes and the water was thrown into the car by the wheels, so that we were drenched a second time, as well as splattered with mud from head to foot. Then we came to a hold-up altogether. In one place a small stream had risen from the flood and carried away the bridge by which we were supposed to cross. The water was too deep to drive through and we had to turn back and find another road. Then our troubles began in earnest.

The main road had been bad enough, but these side roads full of deep wagon ruts and mud holes were ten times worse. It would have been a problem to drive through there by daylight, but after dark it was a nightmare. Our electric head lamps were dim that night for some reason or other and only partly showed up the bad places, and several times I thought we were going to upset. The drizzling rain was still falling and we were soaked and uncomfortable. After a time we gave up trying to find another bridge to cross the stream and get back on the main road and frankly owned that we were lost. Once in a while we saw the dark outline of a farmhouse far back from the road, but we hesitated to wake up the people at that time of night and ask our way.

Margery complained of the feeling of her wet coat and Sahwah suggested that we all sing "How Dry I Am", and see if there was anything in

mental suggestion. So we stopped still at the cross-roads and sang hoarsely in the rain and darkness like disconsolate frogs. The starter refused to work when we wanted to go on again and Nyoda had to get out in the mud and crank the engine.

"She stoops to crank her," said Sahwah, but none of us had the ambition to pinch her for making a pun.

We were apparently traveling through the country in a sort of Roman key pattern, up one road and down another without getting any nearer to the town for which we imagined we were headed. Suddenly something white loomed up before us which proved to be the gate of a fence; we were evidently on private property. Sahwah got out to open it but she could not do it alone, so both Nakwisi and I jumped out to help her. The mud was piled up so high under the gate that it was all we could do to swing it back. The Glow-worm passed through slowly and we closed the gate again. Just then a gust of wind sent down a heavy shower of drops from a near-by tree and we ran hastily for the shelter of the car. Nyoda started immediately and we found ourselves in the main road once more. The gust of wind continued and blew our veils into our faces and made us screw our eyes shut. In such fashion did we travel down the king's highway, and if ever my ardor for automobile touring was dampened, it was then. For a long time nobody had a word to say, not even irrepressible Sahwah. Each one of us sat apart wrapped in our own gloomy thoughts. Finally Nakwisi spoke.

"Does the water run down over the tip of your nose if your nose turns up? Sahwah, yours turns up, will you look and see which way the rain-drops are going?"

There was no answer.

"Well, don't answer, if you don't want to," said Nakwisi, rather crossly. We took our veils down from our eyes and looked around to see the cause of this unusual silence on Sahwah's part. Then we got the second big shock of the evening. _Sahwah was not in the car!_ She had vanished utterly, silently, mysteriously, into the rainy darkness!

CHAPTER VIII.

If I were an experienced writer of fiction I would know how to weave all the various odds and ends of my story into the telling so as to keep the action moving forward all the time, with all parts nicely balanced. But as it is, I am afraid that I have been trying to tell it all at once and am getting it rather one-sided. So far I have told only what happened to us girls in the Glow-worm, and I fear that the reader will have forgotten by this time that there were eight girls who started out on the trip instead of four. So now I am going to carry you back to a point almost at the beginning of the story; the point where we almost struck the old woman and where the Striped Beetle vanished from sight. As I said before, I am going to tell the story just as if I had been along and seen everything, without stopping to quote Gladys or Hinpoha or Medmangi or Chapa.

You will remember that we were proceeding westward through Toledo at

the time and the Striped Beetle was in the lead. Hinpoha sat in the front seat with Gladys, holding Mr. Bob in her lap. The street was crowded with vehicles and Gladys was driving carefully. A wagon loaded almost to the sky with barrels threatened to fall over on them and they had a narrow squeeze to get through between it and the curb. Some small boys on the sidewalk shouted at the driver of the wagon and he shouted back; a street car trying to make headway on a track from which a sand wagon refused to move itself raised an ear-splitting racket with its alarm bell; the noise was so deafening that the girls put their hands over their ears and did not take them down again until Gladys had turned a corner into a quieter street. They had turned another corner before they discovered that the Glow-worm was not right behind them. Gladys merely stopped the car and waited for us to come up.

"They're probably caught in that line of wagons and trucks on T--- Street," said Gladys, when we did not come immediately. "I hope their engine didn't stall on that corner."

The minutes passed and we did not appear.

"Run down to the corner and see what is keeping them," said Gladys to Chapa and Medmangi. The two girls got out and retraced their steps. But nowhere did they see the Glow-worm. Puzzled, they returned to Gladys and she promptly turned the Striped Beetle around and drove back through the streets the way she had come. The Glow-worm had apparently vanished off the face of the earth. Inquiry at frequent points brought out the fact that the Glow-worm had knocked down an old woman (that is the way such things are exaggerated) and had gone on again. Their asking which way it had gone started an argument which ended in a fist fight, for the two small boys they asked each maintained stoutly that it had gone in a different direction. Then the mother of the boys ran out from a grocery store to see what the racket was about and seizing them by the back of their necks she shook them apart, boxing their ears. When the cause of the argument was made known to her she settled it in an emphatic manner by pointing with a fat forefinger down the street.

"They went that way," she declared. "Four girls in tan suits and green veils just like yours."

They took her word for it and started in pursuit of the Glow-worm, expecting to come upon it at every turn, their wonder growing momentarily. They could not understand why Nyoda had ceased to follow them and was taking a route which was not marked in the route book. They inquired at numerous places and found that we had passed just ahead of them.

"I don't blame Nyoda for going this way," said Gladys, "it's lots quieter than the other way; sort of back streets. She probably turned off when the jam occurred on T--- Street and thought we saw her and followed. It seems a little strange that she didn't wait for us to come up, though."

Mr. Bob, our long-eared mascot, had a most angelic disposition, but nevertheless, he knew when he was outraged, and when a yellow cur of no special breed and no breeding at all snarled impudently at him from the curb he jumped through Hinpoha's restraining arms with the intention of chewing up the insolent one. The yellow dog saw him coming and, turning tail, he fled yelping up a side street. Hinpoha shouted commands in

vain; Mr. Bob had set out to put his teeth into that yellow dog and he would not be turned aside from his purpose. Gladys stopped the car and Hinpoha ran after Mr. Bob. The yellow cur knew his neighborhood and turned into an alley just as Mr. Bob nearly had him. Mr. Bob, with Hinpoha hard after him, also turned into the alley. The back door of an empty store offered the fugitive a safe refuge and he darted inside. So did Mr. Bob, growling ferociously, and so did Hinpoha, panting for breath and holding her hand to her side. From the back room of the store the dogs passed to the front and Mr. Bob caught the yellow dog in a tight corner behind a counter. For all he had run in such a cowardly fashion the yellow dog was a good fighter and the battle which occurred when the two clinched frightened Hinpoha out of her wits. She seized an old broom which was standing against the wall and ran behind the counter to beat them apart. In the darkness behind the counter she almost fell over something on the floor, and the broom clattered out of her hand. In her astonishment she forgot the fighting dogs. The thing she had fallen over and which she had, at first, thought was a sack of something, stirred and huddled up against the wall and Hinpoha heard the sharp intaking of a breath. Then she made out the form of a girl; a girl in a blue suit sitting on the floor with her hands over her face.

"Did--did the dogs frighten you?" asked Hinpoha. The girl dropped her hands and looked up quickly. Just then the yellow dog broke away from Mr. Bob and retreated through the back door. Mr. Bob, who had evidently derived honorable satisfaction from the encounter, came over to Hinpoha and subsided at her feet. With a look of wonder Hinpoha turned to the girl crouching on the floor. She had moved into the light from a window and Hinpoha could see that fear was written all over her face. It was a girl about eighteen years old with a round cherubic countenance, framed in fluffy light hair, wide open guileless blue eyes, with an expression as innocent as a baby's. Just now the eyes were swimming in tears.

"You are in trouble?" asked Hinpoha, with ready sympathy.

The girl reached out her hand and took hold of Hinpoha's jacket as a child holds on to its mother, in spite of the fact that she was evidently older than Hinpoha. Hinpoha caught her hand and held it tightly.

"Tell me about it," she said, gently.

The girl gulped down a big sob and wiped her eyes. "I'm--I'm hiding," she said, in a shaky voice.

"Hiding from what?" asked Hinpoha.

"From--from the man I work for," said the girl. "He said I stole something and I didn't, and he says he can have me arrested," she said with fresh sobs.

"But how can anyone have you arrested if you didn't steal anything?" asked Hinpoha.

"I don't know," answered the girl, "but I'm afraid he will." She cried for a moment and then collected herself and went on. "My name is Pearl Baxter," she said. "I used to live on a farm down state with my mother and then she died and I came here to the city and went to work in an office. I was the only girl in the office and I knew the combination of the safe. A few days ago Mr. Sawyer, that's one of the men I work for,

asked me to get certain papers out of the safe, and when I went there I couldn't find them. He made an awful fuss and said I had taken them. They were bonds, if you know what they are. He said he would have me arrested. I believe his son took them because he knew they were there. When the other partner of the firm found they were gone he insisted on having the office searched and the bonds were found in my desk drawer. They would not believe me when I said I did not put them there. That was yesterday and I ran away and hid here all night and I'm afraid to go out for fear they will get me."

She broke down again and wept into her handkerchief. Tender-hearted Hinpoha was ready to weep in sympathy. "You poor thing!" she exclaimed. "Have you no friends who would help you?" she asked.

The girl shook her head. "I don't know anybody up here," she said. "I've only been working here three months."

For Hinpoha there was always one court of last resort. That was Nyoda.

"You come along with me," she said. "I know somebody who can tell you what to do."

She led the girl out to the Striped Beetle and told her story to the other girls. They all agreed that the only thing to do was to take her to Nyoda as quickly as possible. She sat in the tonneau of the car between Chapa and Medmangi with her veil tied down over her face, through which she peered nervously to the right and left as the car moved on through the streets. Gladys's brow was drawn up into a frown of perplexity as corner after corner was turned and they still did not come upon the Glow-worm. Boys playing in the street told them that it had gone past over fifteen minutes before. Hinpoha anxiously wished for a sight of the familiar car so that Pearl could be turned over to Nyoda very soon.

"It's like a game of Hare and Hounds," said Chapa from the back seat. "Nyoda is the hare and we are the hounds. She's probably doing it on purpose to see how well we can trail her to the city limits. You know how fond she is of putting us to unexpected tests."

"I'll make it," said Gladys, determinedly.

Several times she consulted her route book and then she laughed. "The joke is on Nyoda after all," she said. "This way leads to the southern route and not the northern, and they'll have the pleasure of crossing the city again. Won't we have the laugh on them, though, when we meet them at the city limits?"

But the Glow-worm was not waiting for them at the city limits and they were much surprised to learn that it had traveled on over the road to the west. "The southern route?" asked Gladys, wonderingly, "I can't imagine what Nyoda is doing. I'm sure she understood we were to take the northern. It's all right, of course, because there is no great difference in the routes, they each lead to Ft. Wayne, but I can't imagine why she changed without telling us."

"Maybe she couldn't stop the car," said Hinpoha, beginning to giggle. "It's happened before. The fellow next door to us bought a motorcycle and got it started and couldn't stop it again and he whizzed up and down the city until the gas gave out, and there were eleven policemen

chasing him before he got through."

The picture of the Glow-worm traveling across country with the bit between its teeth, carrying its passengers willy-nilly over the wrong road, was so funny that they all laughed aloud, in spite of the improbability of it.

"Maybe she'll make us trail her all the way to Ft. Wayne," said Gladys, musingly. "It's really our fault for losing her; we should have kept a better lookout. But it's a cold day when the Striped Beetle can't catch up with the Glow-worm." And Gladys put on full speed ahead.

Hinpoha was not worrying much about us and our disappearance; her thoughts were taken up with Pearl and her night in the empty storeroom. Hinpoha always takes other people's troubles so to heart.

At Napoleon they stopped for gasoline and learned that the Glow-worm had passed some time before and had also stopped for gasoline.

For the most part Pearl sat silent, turning her head every little while to watch the road behind them. She was that pink-and-white-doll-baby-helpless-in-emergency type of girl who ought never be allowed away from home without a guardian. After they had been traveling awhile she leaned back against the seat and looked so white and faint that the girls became alarmed.

"Do you feel ill?" asked Medmangi, feeling her pulse with a practised hand. Medmangi is going to be a doctor and is in her element when she has a patient to attend to. Pearl opened her big blue eyes languidly.

"I just got light-headed," she said, in a weak voice. "I think maybe it's because I'm--I'm hungry."

"Why didn't we think of it before?" asked Hinpoha, filled with self-reproach. "We might have known you hadn't had anything to eat since yesterday if you stayed in that storeroom all night. We'll stop in this village and get you something."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," said Pearl, in a somewhat embarrassed manner. "I really don't want anything to eat."

"Not want anything to eat!" echoed Hinpoha. "Why don't you want to eat if you're hungry?"

"You see," answered Pearl, still more embarrassed, "when I, when I ran away, I didn't stop to take my purse and I haven't any money to pay--"

"That's nonsense," said Gladys, firmly. "You have got to let us help you. It isn't any more than you would do for someone in the same position."

They stopped and got her something to eat and the others drank pop to keep her company. In spite of her being as hungry as she must have been Pearl did not eat very much; her trouble had evidently taken away her appetite. The girls exerted themselves to cheer her and assured her that everything would come out all right as soon as they found Nyoda and got her advice.

Somebody must have been moving a crockery store in the neighborhood and

dropped it in the middle of the road, for, as they were passing through the outskirts of the little village where they had stopped they ran into a regular field of broken china. Gladys stopped short when she saw it, but it was too late, they were already in the midst of it. Both the front tires breathed their last. I think it should be made a criminal offense to leave things like that in the road. But then maybe the man carrying the china was knocked down by an automobile in the first place, and left the pieces in order to get revenge on some member of the auto driving fraternity. Ever since then I have been wondering how many of our calamities are brought down upon us by our best friends.

Gladys backed out of the mess and set about repairing the damage. The Striped Beetle carried two extra tires done up in a nice shiny cover all ready for emergency, but for some reason or other Gladys couldn't get the old tires off. It seems the demountable rims refused to demount, or whatever it is they are expected to do when you take a tire off.

Don't expect me to get the details straight or I shall throw up the job of reporter right here. I never could see through the workings of a motor car. I am like the Indian who had the automobile explained to him until he knew every part like a brother and then, when asked if he understood it, he replied that he understood all but one thing and that was what made it go without horses. So if the reader, who knows a car from A to Z, will kindly forbear to smile when I muddle things up, I will be her debtor forever.

Gladys saw that she would have to have help in getting those tires off and began scanning the horizon for a man. There are times when a man is a most useful member of society. There was not a man on the horizon at that time, though, and the only promising thing was a house set far back from the road in a grove of trees, and with a vegetable garden running down to the road. They had already left the village behind and habitations were scarce. Gladys went up to the house and returned in a short while with a man, who wrestled with the tires awhile and then proposed driving the car into the yard in the shade of the trees, as the sun was scorching hot in the road. Gladys accepted the invitation with alacrity.

While the Striped Beetle was holding up its poor cut front shoes for the man to take off the girls strolled over to the pump for a drink. A tired-looking woman, holding a fretful baby in her arms, came to the door and asked the girls to come up on the porch and sit down until the exchange of tires was made. Medmangi promptly offered to hold the baby while the woman finished her work. With a sigh of relief the woman handed her the baby.

"Such a time I've had with him to-day," she said, mopping her forehead. "He's cried steady since morning. He acts sick and he's got a fever."

Medmangi took the fretful child and endeavored to soothe him while his mother went about her work. Hinpoha, who is crazy about babies, insisted on holding him half the time, but neither of them could make him stop crying. A three year old girl, red-faced and heavy-eyed, as if she had recently awakened from sleep, peered shyly through the screen door and Chapa coaxed her to come out and sit in her lap. The mother came to the door every few minutes to tell us how thankful she was for the relief.

The relief promised to be one of considerable length, for the Striped Beetle steadfastly refused to put on its new tires. At last, the man proposed going after another man who lived down the road to help him. Gladys joined us on the porch while he was gone and helped amuse the babies. Still the little fellow cried. Medmangi explored for pins with a skilled hand but there was nothing sticking into him. Neither did he appear to be teething.

"There's something the matter with this baby," she said to the mother, when next she came to the door. "Hadh't you better have a doctor?"

The woman came out on the porch and looked down at the child in a worried way. "I sent my husband to town for the doctor this morning," she said, "but he had gone out into the country on a call and would not be back until late to-night. The next nearest doctor is in B----; that's eight miles away and we have no horse. So we'll have to wait until Dr. Lane gets back from the country."

"Wouldn't you like to have me drive over and get the doctor from B---- as soon as the tires are on?" asked Gladys. Gladys is always the one to offer the helping hand.

"Would you?" asked the woman, eagerly.

"I would be very glad to," said Gladys.

The man came back with his friend and between the two of them they managed to get the Striped Beetle shod anew. Gladys drove off to B----, leaving Chapa and Medmangi and Pearl and Hinpoha on the porch with the babies and taking Mrs. Martin with her. She had seen Mrs. Martin give a wistful glance toward the big car and surmised rightly that she had few chances to go automobile riding. They were back in less than an hour saying that the doctor would be right along, and he appeared presently in a dusty roadster with another man beside him, probably a friend.

I suppose everybody has been taught from childhood that virtue is its own reward and one good turn deserves another. But once in awhile they discover that the reward of virtue is just as apt to be trouble as not, and that one good turn can unscrew the lid of a whole canful of calamities. Thus it was that Gladys's generous offer to fetch the doctor from B---- ended up in disaster for all five of us. For the doctor examined the fretful baby and the heavy-eyed little girl and announced that they both had scarlet fever.

Scarlet fever! The girls looked at each other in dismay. Not one of them had had it. And they had all handled both the babies; Medmangi had hung over the little boy most of the time.

"If we have ourselves disinfected," said Medmangi, as they moved hastily toward the car, "there won't be much danger of our getting it. Scarlet fever isn't really contagious in the first stages."

"Stay right where you are," said the doctor, in a tone of authority. "No one must leave this house. You are all under quarantine."

"But we can't stay here," said Gladys. "We're touring and only stopped here."

"That makes no difference," said the doctor. He was a very young doctor

and had recently been appointed health officer in his district. There was a serious epidemic of scarlet fever in that part of the state which it was almost impossible to check because people would not keep to themselves when they had it in the house. Young Dr. Caxton had made up his mind that the next case that was reported would be as rigidly quarantined as they were in the big cities. And automobile tourists would be the very ones to spread the infection abroad through the countryside. He was determined to hold them there at all costs.

They argued and pleaded in vain; he was obdurate. He had brought a friend with him in the car and he proceeded to station him as guard over the house to see that no one left it. Oh yes, he would see to it that they got all necessary supplies; they would suffer no hardship, but, on no account, would a member of that household set a foot off the grounds. He ordered the babies put to bed and the curtains taken down in that room and the rugs taken out. Mrs. Martin obeyed his orders in a flutter of distress. She was frightened because her children had the scarlet fever and worried half to death at the predicament her passing guests were in. She had been so grateful to Gladys for taking her along in the automobile to B----.

But her distress over it was nothing compared to theirs. To be held up in the midst of a tour and quarantined with a scarlet fever case! Whatever was to become of them? If Nyoda were only there!

"Now you'll have to telegraph your father," said Chapa.

Gladys's face was drawn with distress. "Mother would be frightened to death if she knew about it," she said. "I don't believe I'll tell her yet. I'll wait until I hear from Nyoda."

"How will we get word to Nyoda?" asked Hinpoha.

"Ft. Wayne," answered Gladys. "We were to stay there to-night and she must be there by this time."

"You'll send a wire for us?" she asked the doctor beseechingly.

"Certainly," he answered, amiably. "Any service--"

But Gladys cut him short. He was plainly enjoying the situation. The doctor departed with his horrid shiny little case and the message in his pocket and left the guard to watch the house. The first thing he did was to take something out of the Striped Beetle--I don't know what--so Gladys couldn't start it and make a dash for liberty. Gladys was ready to cry with rage at this high handed act, but that was all the good it did her.

"Well, there's one thing about it," said Hinpoha, who was far more philosophical than the rest, "if we have to stay prisoners here we might as well get busy and help Mrs. Martin. It's no fun to have five people quartered on you when there are two sick children in the house." Medmangi was already in the sick room giving medicine and drinks of water in an accomplished manner. It seems that the Winnebagos have a specialist in every line.

The others went down to the kitchen and finished paring the peaches which Mrs. Martin had been trying to can.

Later in the evening the guard slipped an envelope through the screen door. It was a telegram. It was signed by the telegraph company and read: "Yours date addressed Elizabeth Kent Potter Hotel Ft. Wayne undelivered. Party not registered."

CHAPTER IX.

The girls were entirely at sea at not reaching Nyoda at Ft. Wayne. They had counted so confidently upon her advice to help them out of the difficulty in which they found themselves. Being lost from her was the worst calamity they could conceive of. They were very much puzzled and a little hurt that she should have run away and left them as she did. It was so unlike Nyoda. On all other expeditions she had kept them under her eye every minute, like the careful Guardian she was. None of them slept much that night for worrying over the strange predicament they were in. Besides that they had to sleep three in a bed. Gladys made up her mind to wire her father in the morning when the doctor came.

When they looked out of the door in the morning the guard of the day before was gone and a new one had taken his place. Evidently Dr. Caxton was going to do the job thoroughly. Towards noon a buggy drove into the yard and a white-haired man got out and came up on the porch. He carried a shabby medicine case.

"Why, Dr. Lane!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin cordially, when she saw him.

"You left a call for me yesterday when I was out in the country," said Dr. Lane, in a pleasant voice. "I did not get in until early this morning. What's the trouble?"

"It's the children," said Mrs. Martin. "They've got scarlet fever. I was so worried about Bobby yesterday that I sent for Dr. Caxton from B----. We'll have to keep him now, I suppose, but do you want to look at them anyhow? Mary doesn't want to take her medicine, and maybe you could--"

"Certainly I'll go up and see them," said Dr. Lane. He was the kind of man you would love to have for your grandfather. His pockets bulged suspiciously as though they contained bags of lemon drops or peanuts. Talking cheerfully all the while he entered the sick room and looked at the patients.

"So Dr. Caxton said they had scarlet fever!" he said, musingly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Martin.

"Scarlet fever your grandmother!" returned Dr. Lane. "They've got prickly heat. If Dr. Caxton called that scarlet fever, what would he call a real case of scarlet fever?"

A minute later the man on guard heard a laugh that almost shook the windows of the house. Not long after that he was pedaling down the road on the bicycle that had brought him, very red in the face and very hot under the collar. The quarantine ended right then and there. Whether

Dr. Caxton came again or not we never found out, for the girls left immediately. They sped over the road to Ft. Wayne as fast as the Striped Beetle could carry them. They went to the Potter Hotel and naturally discovered that we had not stayed there. I believe they had held to the hope all the time that we had arrived after the telegram had gone back undelivered. They stood around irresolutely until the check man to whom we had talked spied them and told them that we had left not half an hour before and were on our way to Chicago by way of Ligonier. They could hardly believe their ears when they heard that Nyoda had gone off and left them the second time. But as they were so close behind us the only thing for them to do was to follow.

Gladys stopped at a service station and had the Striped Beetle's carburetor adjusted, or something that sounded like that, and then started post-haste on the road to Chicago. Pearl looked from one to the other of the girls with fear and suspicion in her face. "Is there--is there really such a person as you say you are taking me to see, or are you taking me somewhere else?" she faltered.

And the girls had a hard time convincing her that Nyoda was not a myth, although they began to wonder if she had not turned into one. Gradually Pearl began to thaw out under their persistent cordiality and was really not such a bad companion after all. She still furtively watched the road behind them as if she feared pursuit, but some of the scared rabbit look was going out of her eyes when she began to realize that the width of a whole state lay between her and her persecutors and they had absolutely no clue to her whereabouts. She repeatedly expressed her amazement that a group of girls so young had the courage to travel by themselves in an automobile, and were not frightened to death to have gotten separated from their chaperon, but were calmly following her up as fast as they were able.

She was much interested when she heard they were Camp Fire Girls, and wanted to know all about the Winnebago doings.

"I wish I could have belonged to something like that in the city where I worked," she said with a sigh, "maybe I wouldn't have been so lonesome all the time. And I would have had a Guardian--is that what you call her?--to go to when I got into trouble."

"Maybe you'll get into a group yet," said Hinpoha, optimistically. "There are some in the city where you live."

Pearl was as great a curiosity to them as they were to her. How any girl of eighteen could be so babyish and helpless as she was was a revelation to them. Everyone of them wished devoutly that she could become a Winnebago so they could make something out of her. Hinpoha began making plans right away.

"As long as you have no people and it doesn't matter where you work, why couldn't you come to Cleveland and find work, and possibly join our group?" she suggested. "I'm sure Nyoda would take you in. When Migwan goes to college she won't be able to attend the meetings regularly and there will be a vacant place. Couldn't you?" she cried, warming to her plan, and the rest of the girls voiced their approval.

"Oh, do you suppose I could?" asked Pearl timidly, clasping her hands before her in a nervous manner. "Oh, I never could do it. I'm afraid to go to a bigger city for fear I'll get into trouble again. And I never

could do the things you girls do, I just never could." And she looked at them with appealing helplessness in her big blue eyes.

"Nonsense," said Hinpoha, "you can do anything you want to if you only think you can do it." And she told her a marvelous tale of how I earned the money to go to college when things seemed determined to go against me. Which is all perfectly nonsensical; the chance of earning money to go to college fell right into my lap. Pearl only opened her eyes wider at Hinpoha's recital and answered with a sigh, "Oh, I never could do it!"

The girls went on happily planning how they would take her back to Cleveland with them and make her one of the Winnebagos.

They had to slow up the Striped Beetle along the road for a cow and a calf that were monopolizing the right of way and Hinpoha decided to take a picture of them. "Oh, this film's finished," she said impatiently, examining her camera. "I'll have to stop and reload. Oh, Gladys, do you mind if I open the trunk here on the road? My extra films are all in there."

"Go ahead and open it," said Gladys good-naturedly, handing her the key.

Hinpoha got out and went behind the machine to get her film from the trunk, all the while calling out to the cow and her calf in a friendly and coaxing manner not to walk away before she could take them. But she stopped suddenly in the midst of a persuasive "Here, bossy, stay here," to utter a surprised exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Gladys.

"There isn't any trunk here." cried Hinpoha. "It's gone!"

Consternation reigned in the Striped Beetle. The trunk, containing all their extra clothes, had vanished from the rack at the back of the car!

"And my scarf was in it," said Hinpoha, ready to cry with distress, "that mother sent me from Italy!"

"Don't worry, we'll get it again," said Gladys soothingly, although she was as much dismayed herself. "Where did we have it last? We had it in Ft. Wayne, I know, because we opened it there. It must have been taken off in the service station where we had the carburetor adjusted. We'll have to go back and see if it's there."

Accordingly they turned around and drove swiftly back to Ft. Wayne. Inquiries at the service station at first brought out nothing, because the proprietor declared that the trunk had not been touched--whoever heard of taking off a trunk to adjust a carburetor? But a repairman coming in just then, heard the talk about the trunk and said he was the man who had made the adjustment on the car and he noticed that the trunk rack seemed to be sagging and took off the trunk to fix it. He had not put the trunk on again, because just then he had been called to help install new gears in a car for a man who was in a great hurry and had called one of the helpers to put on the trunk and fill the tank. The helper was called and admitted that he had put a trunk on a car, but it was not the Striped Beetle; it was a similar car owned by a man who was driving to Indianapolis. He had thought the trunk belonged to

him.

The girls looked at each other tragically. Their trunk on the road to Indianapolis!

"How long ago did he start?" asked Gladys.

"About an hour," answered the repairman.

"We'll have to go after him," said Gladys, resolutely. "We need that trunk. Can you tell us what the man's name is?"

"Hansen," replied the repairman. "George Hansen. Driving seven passenger touring car, brown, with black streamer and gold striping. He was driving to Indianapolis over the road that goes through Huntington, Marion and Anderson; I heard him talking about it. That's one of the main roads out of here. You ought to be able to overtake him on the way; he's a slow driver and his motor was missing pretty badly. Wouldn't let me fix it though, because it would take too long and he wanted to get to Indianapolis in time to see the races. He lives there, so you ought to be able to find him; runs some kind of a store."

He poured out his information eagerly; he seemed anxious to do anything he could to aid in the recovery of the trunk, since he had put it on the wrong car. "Funny how well it fitted that other rack!" he said. But Gladys says there is nothing peculiar about that because the two cars, being the same make, had the same style rack, and the trunk was the ordinary one carried by automobilists.

She hastily looked up the route to Indianapolis and started in pursuit of the unconscious thief. It was then nearly five o'clock in the evening. They really did not have much hope of catching the other car on the way, since it had an hour's start, but they were confident of recovering the trunk in Indianapolis, where they could find out the man's address and follow him to his home. Fortune played into their hands in that they found good roads all the way and had no breakdowns, and sometime after eight they reached Indianapolis. There were half a dozen George Hansens in the telephone book, four of whom were away on automobile trips. But further inquiry brought out the fact that one of them did own a seven passenger brown W---- car. He was expected home that evening, but had not yet arrived. His wife (it was she who was talking) was very sorry about the trunk, but if it had been placed on the rack of her husband's car it would undoubtedly arrive when he did. He would probably come home during the night, as he was very anxious to see the races, which were to take place the next two days. Would they call later?

Somewhere on the road they had passed him, but it was too late now to wonder where. The only thing to do was to wait until he came. At ten o'clock he had not arrived yet. The girls went down to the Young Women's Christian Association, where they could spend the night. Gladys concluded that Nyoda must be told if possible where they were, and judging that she had reached Chicago by that time she wired the Carrie Wentworth Inn, where they had planned to stay that night, telling what had happened and saying she would arrive in Chicago the next day.

They called the Hansen home the first thing in the morning and learned to their dismay that Mr. Hansen had not yet returned. But he was expected any minute and Hinpoha would not hear of leaving without the

trunk. Shortly afterward their telegram came back undelivered from the Carrie Wentworth Inn in Chicago, with the notation, "Party not registered." That threw them into a state of bewilderment, but Gladys, after thinking hard and long about the matter, remarked that the Glow-worm had a habit of breaking down at inconvenient times and that probably accounted for our not having reached Chicago the night before.

Every half hour they called up the Hansen home to find out if Mr. Hansen had returned and every time they received a negative answer. Finally, Hinpoha suggested that they drive out to his house and sit on the curbstone where they could see him coming, before they spent all their substance in a riotous feeding of nickels into the public telephone. Which they proceeded to do. But their vigil was vain, for he came not and it became apparent that they must either depart without the trunk or stay there another night. Gladys was for going on and having it sent after them, but Hinpoha refused to budge until she had seen that scarf with her own eyes. Accordingly, they sent another wire to the Carrie Wentworth Inn, thinking surely Nyoda must have arrived by that time, and stayed a second night in Indianapolis.

The next morning they received the news that Mr. Hansen had arrived, but alas, he had brought no trunk with him. He knew nothing about the matter at all. He could remember no trunk being on the back of his car when he left the repair shop in Ft. Wayne, but then, he had not looked particularly. He had made several stops on the way home on business--he was a traveling salesman--and that was how they had passed him on the road. The car had stood for a time in a dozen different places, the trunk could easily have been stolen, and he had never known the difference. Possibly they could hold the repair shop responsible.

The girls were much downcast at this news, especially Hinpoha, on account of the scarf that had been the last gift of her mother. Where was the trunk now? It might be anywhere between the north and south poles in that length of time. Gladys's only hope was now that it had been mislaid and not stolen, and that it would fall into the hands of some honest person who would ferret out the owner.

They were just about to start out for Chicago again when they were handed a telegram. It was from the Carrie Wentworth Inn and was dated midnight of the night before. It read: "Wire from party you want says address Forty-three Main Street Rochester Indiana."

That wire threw them into great perplexity. What were Nyoda and the girls doing in Rochester, when they had been on the road to Chicago two days before?

"The Glow-worm is more like a flea than a glow-worm," said Hinpoha. "It's never where you expect to find it. I really believe Nyoda has lost control of the car and it is taking her wherever it wants to."

Gladys was consulting the route book. "Rochester is on the direct road to Indianapolis," she said. "We can make the run in a few hours. I'm going to wire Nyoda that we're coming and she should wait for us."

So she sent the wire we received that morning in Rochester:

"Where on earth are you? Wait Rochester for us. Coming to-day noon."

That was Friday, the day of the big races in Indianapolis. The town was

full of people. Tourists from all over managed to make the city just at that time, and the streets were crowded with motor cars of every description. Gladys looked sharply at every car they passed on the way out of the city to see if her trunk was on the back of any of them, but in vain.

"I suppose I'll never see that scarf again," said Hinpoha, sadly.

Pearl looked a little enviously at the women who came to town in their big fine cars with drivers and bull dogs. "It must be lovely to be rich and taken care of," she said, with a sigh.

Pearl was the kind of a girl who should have been born to a life of luxurious ease. She certainly had no backbone to fight her own battles in the world. She was a Clinger, who would curl around the nearest support like a morning glory vine. She didn't seem to have any more spirit than an oyster. Hinpoha, still imbued with the idea of taking her in hand and making a Winnebago out of her, kept trying to draw her out with an idea of finding out what her possibilities were. It was rather a matter of pride with us that each one of the Winnebagos excelled in some particular thing. When Hinpoha asked her what her favorite play was she answered that she had never been to the theater and considered it wicked. She opened her eyes in disapproval when Hinpoha mentioned motion pictures. Hinpoha had been on the verge of launching out on our escapade with the film company the summer before, but checked herself hastily. She also suppressed the fact that I had written scenarios, which fact Hinpoha glories in a great deal more than I do and which she generally sprinkles into people's dishes on every occasion. The fact that Gladys danced in public seemed to shock her beyond words. Clearly she was unworldly to the point of narrowness, and Hinpoha began to reflect that, after all, she might be somewhat of a wet blanket on the Winnebago doings if she came and joined the group. Pearl showed such marked disapproval of Gladys when she remarked that she wished her father were in town so they could have gone to the races that an awkward silence fell on the group. No topic of conversation seemed safe to venture upon.

They were driving along country roads now and in one place they crossed a small river with the most gorgeous early autumn flowers growing along its banks. They caught Hinpoha's color-loving eye and she must get out and wander among them. Gladys and Chapa and Medmangi decided that they too would like a stroll beside the river, after sitting in the car so long. Pearl did not care to get out; she offered to stay in the car and hold the purses of the other girls until they returned. The four girls walked along the stream, admiring the flowers, but not picking any, because they would only fade and wither and if left on the stems they would give pleasure to hundreds of people. Now and then they dabbled their fingers in the cool water.

"It's such a temptation to go wading," sighed Hinpoha, who never will grow up and be dignified if she lives to be a hundred.

Gladys was afraid Hinpoha would yield to the temptation if it stared her in the face too long, and announced that it was time to be under way. Reluctantly, Hinpoha tore herself away from the river and followed Gladys to the road.

What a rude ending that little wayside idyll was destined to have!

For when they returned to the road where they had left the Striped Beetle there was nothing but empty air. Car, Pearl, and four purses, containing every cent the girls had with them, had vanished!

CHAPTER X.

At first the girls could not believe their eyes. But it was all too true. The deep tracks in the dust of the road showing the well-known prints of the Striped Beetle's tires told beyond a doubt that the car had gone on and left them.

"But I never heard it start!" said Gladys.

"It was the murmuring of your old brook, Hinpoha, that you were raving about," said Chapa, "that filled our ears."

It took them actual minutes to realize that Pearl, the spineless clinging doll-faced girl they had befriended, had sold them out.

"And we took her for such a baby!" said Hinpoha, in bewilderment.

"Who would ever dream she could drive a car?" gasped Gladys. "She was afraid to toot the horn." To lose your automobile in the midst of a tour must be like having your horse shot under you. One minute you're en route and the next minute you're rooted, if the reader will forgive a very lame pun. And the spot where the Striped Beetle had been (figuratively) shot from under the girls could not have been selected better if it had been made to order for a writer of melodrama. There was not a house in sight nor a telephone wire. The dust in the road was three inches deep and the temperature must have been close to a hundred. They were at least five miles from the nearest town. Chapa looked at Medmangi, Medmangi looked at Hinpoha, and Hinpoha looked at Gladys. Gladys, having no one else to look at, scratched her head and thought.

"Well," she said finally, "we can't stay here all day. We might as well walk to the nearest town and tell the police. They may be able to trace the car. It was stolen once before and they found it in a town forty miles away."

Whenever anyone mentions that walk in the heat the four girls begin to pant and fan themselves with one accord. They had gone about three miles when they came upon the Striped Beetle standing in the road, abandoned. With a cry of joy the girls threw themselves upon it. The cause for its abandonment soon came to light. The gasoline tank was empty. Otherwise it was undamaged. But before it could join the innumerable caravan again it must have gasoline, and naturally there was none growing on the bushes.

"You two sit in the car and see that no one else runs away with it," said Gladys to Medmangi and Chapa, "and Hinpoha and I will go for gasoline."

It was not until they had finished the two miles to town and stood by a gasoline station that they remembered that they had no money. The

gasoline man firmly refused to give them any gas unless they paid for it. Gladys was aghast. Hinpoha leaned wearily against a post and mopped her hot face. Hinpoha suffers more from the heat than the rest of us.

"Pretty tough to be dead broke, aint it, lady?" asked a grimy urchin, who had been an interested witness of Gladys's discomfiture.

"Worse to be alive and broke," jeered another one. Gladys's face was crimson with heat and embarrassment. She turned and walked rapidly away from the place, followed by Hinpoha.

"You'll have to wire home for money now," said Hinpoha.

"And lose the bet," said Gladys, disconsolately. "And father'll laugh his head off to think how neatly we were beaten.

"I know what I'll do," she said, resolutely. "I'll not wire him at all. I'll wire the bank where I have my own money and have them wire me some."

Accordingly, she hunted up the telegraph office and sent a wire collect to her bank, feeling much pleased with herself at the idea of having found a way out without calling on her father for aid.

The telegraph office was in the railway station and she and Hinpoha sat down after sending the wire and waited for the ship to come in, wondering what the other girls would think when they failed to come back with the gasoline. It was past dinnertime but there was no dinner for them as long as they had no money. From jaunty tourist to penniless pauper in two hours is quite a change. An hour passed; two hours, but no gold-laden message came over the wire. Hinpoha had been chewing her fingers for the last hour.

"Oh, please stop that," cried Gladys irritably, "you make me nervous. You remind me of a cannibal."

"Isn't there a poem about 'My beautiful Cannibalee?'" returned Hinpoha. "I'll go out and eat grass if that will make you feel any better," she continued. She strolled outdoors, leaving Gladys listening to the clickety-click of the telegraph instrument and growing more nervous every minute. Presently Hinpoha came back and said she couldn't stand it outside at all because there was a crate of melons and a box of eggs on the station platform, and she was afraid she wouldn't have the strength to resist if she stayed out there with them.

"And it's going to rain," she announced. "You ought to see the sky toward the west."

And then the darkness began to make itself felt; not the blue darkness of twilight, but the black darkness of thunder clouds through which zig-zags of lightning began to stab. A baby, waiting in the station with its mother for the train, began to wail with fright and Hinpoha forgot her hunger in an effort to amuse him. Then the storm broke. The train roared in just as it began and mingled its noise with the thunder. Hardly had it disappeared up the track when there came a crash of thunder that shook the station to its foundations, followed by a dazzling sheet of blue light, and then the telegraph operator bounded out of his little enclosure, white with fear. His instrument had been struck, as well as the wires on the outside of the building and the

roof began to burn. Gladys and Hinpoha rushed out into the rain regardless of their unprotected state and found shelter in a near-by shed, from which they watched the progress of what might well be taken for a second deluge.

"If the water rises much higher in the road we won't need any gasoline," remarked Hinpoha. "The Striped Beetle will float."

"I only hope the girls got the storm curtains buttoned down in time," Gladys kept saying over and over again.

"If it starts to float," persisted Hinpoha, "do you suppose it will come this way, or will they have to steer it? Would the steering-wheel be any good, I wonder, or would they have to have a rudder? Oh," she said brightly, "now I know what they mean by the expression 'turning turtle'. It happens in cases of flood; the car turns turtle and swims home. If it only turned into turtle soup," she sighed.

Gladys looked up suddenly. "What time was it when we sent that wire to my bank?" she asked.

"A quarter after one," replied Hinpoha, promptly. "I heard a clock chiming somewhere. And I calculated that I would just about last until you got an answer."

"A quarter after one," repeated Gladys. "That's Central time. That was a quarter after two Cleveland time. The bank closes at two o'clock. They probably never sent me any money!"

"Now you'll have to wire your father after all," said Hinpoha.

For answer Gladys pointed to the blackened telegraph pole which was lying with its many arms stretched out across the roof of the station. There would be no wires sent out that day.

By the time the rain had ceased the darkness of the thunder clouds had been succeeded by the darkness of night, and Hinpoha and Gladys took their way wearily back over the flooded road to where the Striped Beetle stood.

"Did you have to dig a well first, before you got that gasoline?" called Chapa, as they approached. (They _had_ put down the storm curtains, Gladys noted.)

Gladys made her announcement briefly and they all settled down to gloom.

"Talk about being shipwrecked on a desert island," said Hinpoha. "I think one can get beautifully shipwrecked on the inhabited mainland. We are experiencing all the thrills of Robinson Crusoe and the Swiss family Robinson combined."

"We haven't any Man Friday," observed Gladys.

"What good would he be if we had him?" inquired Hinpoha, gloomily.

"He could act as chauffeur," replied Gladys, "and supply the modern flavor."

"This is Friday, too," remarked Medmangi.

"That's why the car won't start," said Hinpoha, "it won't start anything on Friday."

"Couldn't we dig for oil?" suggested Chapa. "We're in the oil belt. There must be all kinds of gasoline in the earth under our very feet, and we languishing on top of it! It's like the stories where the man perishes of thirst in the desert right on top of the water hole."

"We really and truly are Robinson Crusoe-like," said Gladys, looking out at the flooded fields and deserted road.

"Robinson Crusoe had the advantage of us in one thing," said Hinpoha, returning to her main theme. "He had a corn-stalk, and clams, and things."

"If we only had some ham, we could have some ham and eggs, if we only had some eggs," quoted Gladys.

"Here's where the Slave of the Lamp would come in handy," sighed Hinpoha.

"You might rub the lamp," said Gladys, pointing to the tail light, "and maybe the Slave will appear."

"I want baked potatoes on my order," said Gladys.

"And I want broiled chicken," said Chapa.

Hinpoha got down and solemnly rubbed the tail lamp of the Striped Beetle, exclaiming, "Slave, appear!"

Something black bounded out of the darkness at the side of the road and landed at her feet. It was Mr. Bob, who had gone off for exercise. He carried something in his mouth which he laid decorously on the ground beside her. She stooped to look at it. It was an apple.

The girls all shouted. Hinpoha straightened up. "Girls," she said solemnly, "coming shadows cast their events before, I mean, coming events cast their shadows before. Where there's honey you'll find bees, and where there's apples you'll find trees. The famine is over, and now for the feast."

She led the way down the road with Chapa and Medmangi on either side. They found the tree, close beside the road, and loaded with fruit. They filled their pockets for Gladys and returned to the Striped Beetle, and then for some time, as Hinpoha said, "Nothing was heard in the air but the hurrying munch of the greening."

"It must be a disadvantage to be a negro," remarked Hinpoha reflectively, "you can't tell the difference when they're clean."

"May I ask," inquired Gladys politely, "just what it was that caused you to make that remark at this time?"

"Greening apples," returned Hinpoha, calmly. "You can't tell which are ripe and which are green."

"You can tell by the seeds," said Gladys.

"All seeds are black by night," returned Hinpoha.

"Not changing the subject," said Chapa, "but where are we going to stay to-night?"

"You're not going to stay," replied Hinpoha, "you're staying. Right here. The Inn of the Striped Beetle.

"Under the wide and starry sky
Fold up the seats and let us lie!"

"We'll sleep with the raggle taggle gypsies, O!" added Gladys.

"I want a fire," said Hinpoha. "We always have a fire when we sleep out."

"Well, build one in a puddle, if you can," said Gladys. "Your hair will be the only blaze we have to-night."

Chapa and Medmangi stood up together on the running-board and began to sing dolefully,

"Forsaken, forsaken, forsaken, am I,
Like the bones at a banquet, all men pass me by."

"I wish a few would pass by," said Gladys, "By the way, have you noticed that not a single car or wagon has passed through here since we've been stranded? I thought this was the main road."

"If this is the main road," said Hinpoha, "I'd hate to be stranded on a by-path."

Of course, the girls did not know then that the storm had washed out the bridges on either side of them and the roadway had been closed to traffic. They sat peering into the darkness like Columbus looking for land and wondering why no one came along to whom they could appeal for a tow into the village. The moon shone, a slender sickle in the west that Gladys said reminded her of the thin slices of melon they used to serve for breakfast at Miss Russell's school.

"I think it looks more like a toe nail," said Hinpoha, squinting sidewise at it.

"Don't look at it squarely, it'll bring you bad luck," said Chapa.

"I'm not looking at it," said Hinpoha, "it's looking at me."

"Where does the man in the moon go when it turns into a sickle?" asked Medmangi.

"That doesn't worry me half so much as where Pearl went with my silver mesh bag," said Gladys. That brought them all down to earth again and back to the cause of their predicament, and the moon turned into a yellow banana and fell off the sky counter while they voiced their indignation. And, of course, they all turned on Hinpoha for being taken in by her in the first place, and Hinpoha vented her irritation on Mr. Bob, who was sitting with his head on her knee in a lover-like

attitude.

"It's all your fault that we are in this mess," she said to him, crossly. "If you hadn't jumped out of the car after that yellow dog and chased him into the empty store I wouldn't have had to go after you, and if I hadn't gone after you I would never have discovered Pearl and brought her along with us. It's the last time I'll ever travel with you." Mr. Bob, feeling the reproach in her tone, crept away with his head down.

"O come, let's not quarrel about whose fault it was," said Gladys. "It isn't the first time people have been taken in."

"We seem to be left out, rather than taken in," murmured Hinpoha.

"You're unusually brilliant to-night," remarked Chapa. "It must have been the apples, because on an ordinary diet you never say anything bright."

"Is that so?" said Hinpoha.

"Look at the stars," said Gladys hastily, "aren't they brilliant to-night?"

"Almost as brilliant as Hin--" began Chapa.

"If we sit up late enough," said Gladys, cutting in on Chapa's remark, "we may see some of the winter stars. I actually believe there's Orion now."

"And the Twins," cried Hinpoha, forgetting her momentary offended feeling in the interest of her discovery.

"And Sirius and the Bull and the River," added Gladys. "It's just like getting a peep at the actors in their dressing-rooms before it is time for them to come out on the stage, to see the winter stars now."

"I hate to look at the stars so much," said Hinpoha, dolefully. "They make me feel so small."

"I should think that anything that made you feel small would--"

Gladys again interrupted the flow of Chapa's wit, directed this time against Hinpoha's bulk.

"I'm going to bed," she announced. There was a scramble for the robes and for comfortable places in the tonneau, and it took much adjusting and readjusting before there was anything resembling quiet in the bedchamber of the Striped Beetle. But weariness can snore even on the floor boards of a car and that long walk over the road had done its work for at least two of the girls. The last thing they heard was Hinpoha drowsily spouting:

"Let me sleep in a car by the side of the road,
Where the hop toads are croaking near-by,
With Medmangi's camera between my knees stowed,
And Gladys's foot in my eye!"

And then, when they were all nicely settled and had dropped off to

sleep, Hinpoha had the nightmare and screamed the most blood-curdling screams and cried out that the apple tree was hugging her to death, which sounded nonsensical, but was really suggestive. For, in the morning she discovered that green apples are gone but not forgotten when used as an article of diet and sat doubled up in silent agony on the floor of the car and announced she was dying.

"It serves you right," said Medmangi, in her best doctor manner. "You were in such a hurry to eat them that you ate every one that came along without waiting to find out whether it was ripe or not. The rest of us stuck to the ripe ones and we're all right."

"Well, the unripe ones are sticking to me," groaned Hinpoha, unhappily.

Mr. Bob laid his head on her knee with an air of sympathy. Where Hinpoha is concerned he never stops to think whether the sympathy is deserved or not.

"What family do apples belong to, anyway?" asked Gladys idly, seeing it was time to turn Medmangi aside from preaching to Hinpoha.

"Not my family," said Chapa, "we're all peaches."

"Forget-me-not family," said Hinpoha, with another groan.

They ate more apples for breakfast, except Hinpoha, who pretended not to see when they offered them to her. Then Gladys decided to walk to town again to see what cheer there was there.

"Up, up, Hinpoha," she cried, "and join me in my morning stroll."

"You should say 'Double up, Hinpoha', like 'double up Lucy'," said Chapa, and then dodged as Hinpoha's hand reached out for her hair.

Hinpoha tried to stand up, but immediately sat down again, and Chapa went to town with Gladys.

They sat and watched the repairmen fixing the wires of the telegraph and, after a while, the messages began to pour in again. And one of them was the one that brought joy to Gladys's soul and as soon as the formalities were gone through she had actual money once more. They bought enough gasoline to bring the Striped Beetle in and returned to the anchored ones in triumph. They found that during their absence Hinpoha had manufactured a large "For Rent" sign and hung it on the front of the car, intending, as she said, to go into business and rent out the car at a dollar an hour until they had enough money to proceed.

"How were you intending to rent it out without any gasoline to run it?" inquired Gladys.

"Make them pay in advance," replied Hinpoha.

"With the constant stream of foot-sore pedestrians over this road it would no doubt have been profitable," said Gladys, scanning the road up and down. There was not a living being in sight. But Gladys knew the reason now, for she had seen the washout.

To get the Striped Beetle back to town they had to drive through private property to reach the other road. After eating breakfast--the

first real meal they had had since the morning before--they set out once more for Rochester to meet Nyoda.

"So it's money makes the Striped Beetle go," said Hinpoha reflectively, as they sped along. "And I had been thinking all the while it was gasoline."

CHAPTER XI.

When the gust of wind overtook us that night while Sahwah and Nakwisi and I were struggling to shut the gate we had run against in the darkness, Nakwisi and I jumped into the Glow-worm in haste and we all thought Sahwah was in too. But in running for the car she slipped in the mud and fell flat on her face in the puddle. By the time she had picked herself up and wiped the mud out of her eyes the Glow-worm was gone. Slogging along in the pools of water she ran shouting down the road. She could hear the engine of the Glow-worm throbbing in the distance; then the sound began to die away. She knew then that they had not yet noticed her absence, but they must presently and would return for her. So she set out in the direction in which the car had vanished, going, as she supposed, to meet them. The road was so dark she could not see her hand in front of her eyes, and what with the wind moaning mournfully and the rain falling all around her, it was rather a dismal walk. On one side of her was a stretch of swamp where frogs glumped and piped in every known key. Sahwah is not nervous, however, and to her the voice of a frog is simply the voice of a frog and not the wail of a banshee, and anyway, her mind was occupied with pulling her feet out of the mud in the road and setting them in again. And she was straining her ears for the sound of the Glow-worm, and all other noises made little or no impression on her.

It seemed to her that it was high time the others had missed her and were coming back to pick her up. "Probably stuck in the mud somewhere," was her consoling thought, "and I'll come upon them if I keep going far enough."

And so she kept on pulling her feet out of the mud and setting them in again. By and by the road narrowed down until it seemed no more than a path, and then without warning it ended abruptly against a building. Sahwah had been looking at her feet and not into the distance, and due to the force of inertia which we learned about in the Physics class, which keeps people going once they have started, she did not stop as soon as the road did and ran her nose smartly against the building, which proved to be a barn, Sahwah drew back with a start, rubbing her injured nose. Gradually, the fact dawned on her that she was lost. She looked for the road from which she had strayed, but it seemed to have rolled itself up and departed. The croaking of the frogs came from everywhere and she could not locate the swamp. She walked around for awhile, and finally, did walk into the swamp, but there was no road anywhere near. There was water, water, everywhere. Sahwah, who had once declared she could never get enough of water, got enough of it that night.

She thought of the wicked uncle brook in Undine which had risen up and covered the land, and she wondered if something of the kind had

not happened again. She railed inwardly against the darkness of the country roads and wished with all her heart for the lighted byways of the city, with their rows of cheerful lights on posts and their frequent catch basins that were capable of subduing the most rampant uncle brook. Several times more she fell, and once she stepped into a puddle over her shoe-tops. Then she fell against a fence and tore her skirt. Then, when she was sure she had found the road again she ran plump into the barn again, from a different side this time. A window frame minus a window told that the barn was empty and with a grunt of utter disgust at the wetness of the world in general, Sahwah climbed in and stood on a dry floor. She made up her mind to stay there until the sound of the engine would tell her that the Glow-worm had come for her. As the time went by and no familiar throbbing rose on the air, she began to have cold chills when she realized that we might not yet have noticed her absence, and might be miles away by that time.

"At any rate," she decided, "I'm going to stay in here until it stops raining. If I get any wetter somebody'll take me for a sponge." She took off her jacket and wrung the water out of it and then wrung the water from the tail of her skirt, where it had been dripping on her ankles. Luckily she could not see herself in the darkness, for the green color from her veil had run in streaks all over her face and she looked like a savage painted for the war-path.

A half hour drizzled by and then she heard the most welcome sound in the world, the honk of the Glow-worm's horn. Then she saw the glimmer of the headlights coming toward her out of the distance. And the strangest part of it was that the road was in just the opposite direction from where she thought it was. She climbed out of the barn window and ran toward the lights, landing in a puddle in the road with a mighty splash. The next minute the lights were full on her and the car came to a sudden stop.

"You will run off and leave me, will you?" she called, running forward. Then she paused. The driver at the wheel was not Nyoda, but a man. There was no one else in the car.

"Excuse me," she said, stepping back. "I thought you were friends of mine." And the car moved on.

But if Sahwah had not found the Glow-worm she had, at least, found the road, and she made up her mind not to lose it again until she had come upon the others. Dawn found her still trudging along, very wet, very muddy, very tired and very much puzzled. For she had not come upon the Glow-worm stuck in the mud as she had expected.

The rain had stopped and the sun was opening a watery eye on the horizon. The east wind was rising and ushering in the day. The frogs ceased croaking and the birds began to twitter. It was a morning to delight the soul, that is, any but a lonely soul which was wandering around, wet to the knees, unutterably weary, separated from its kindred souls, and without a cent of money. Sahwah had left her purse in the Glow-worm. By the position of the sun she discovered that she was traveling toward the west. The events of the night before were like a dream in her mind. The storm, the ball, the finding of the necklace in Nyoda's pocket and the flight in the rain were all jumbled together. She sat down on a stone by the roadside to think things over, and let down her damp hair to fly in the wind. For once in her life Sahwah was at a loss what to do next. So she sat still and waited for inspiration.

The sun dried her hair and her coat and the mud on her shoes. The wild asters along the road craned their necks to get a look at this great muddy creature that sat in their midst, and a bird or two paused inquiringly before her.

"I shall sit here," she said aloud, quoting the Frog Footman in Alice in Wonderland, "till tomorrow, or next day, maybe." It suddenly seemed to Sahwah as if she would like nothing better than to sit there forever. The stone she was sitting on was so soft and comfortable, and the sun was so warm and pleasant and the breeze was so soft and caressing. The song of the birds became very loud and clear; then it began to melt away. Sahwah's head nodded; then she slid off the stone and lay full length in the grass, sleeping as soundly as a babe in its cradle.

Mr. and Mrs. James Watterson of Chicago were motoring back to their home from the races in Indianapolis. The night before the Indianapolis papers had been full of the disappearance of Margery Anderson and the efforts her uncle was making to recover her. He even offered a reward for information concerning her whereabouts. The papers said he had gone to Chicago to follow up a clue. Mrs. Watterson had read every word of the article with great interest. She did not know the Andersons and she was not particularly interested in them and their troubles, but she had nothing else to do at the moment, her husband having gone out and left her alone in the hotel, so she read and reread the details of the affair until she knew them by heart.

The next morning, on their way north, they came upon Sahwah sleeping in the road. "Somebody dead or hurt here," exclaimed Mr. Watterson, and he stopped the car and jumped out. Sahwah's face was streaked with green from the soaked veil and she looked absolutely ghastly. And her arm was twisted under her head in the peculiar position in which Sahwah always sleeps, so that it looked as if she had fallen on it.

"Her heart's beating," announced Mr. Watterson, after investigating.

Mrs. Watterson came out and also looked Sahwah over. A handkerchief was dangling half out of the pocket of Sahwah's coat and a name written on it in indelible ink caught the woman's eye. That name was Margery Anderson. Sahwah had gotten something into her eye the day before, and not having a handkerchief handy--Sahwah never has when she wants one--Margery had handed her one of hers. At the sight of that name Mrs. Watterson was in a flutter of excitement. The story in the newspaper was fresh in her mind. "It's that Anderson girl!" she exclaimed, holding up the handkerchief.

Quickly they lifted Sahwah, still sleeping, into the car. They thought she was unconscious and I believe their idea was to take her to the next house they came to. But, of course, as soon as the car started Sahwah woke up and looked with a gasp of surprise into the faces near her. At first when she felt the throb of the engine under her she had thought she was in the Glow-worm. Mr. and Mrs. Watterson were as surprised as she was. They had not expected her to come to life in just that manner.

Of course, Sahwah wanted to know where she was and whither she was going.

"You are going to your friends, my dear," replied Mrs. Watterson.

"Do you know where they are?" asked Sahwah, wondering how they had come upon the whereabouts of the Glow-worm. Mrs. Watterson merely smiled ambiguously. Sahwah looked at her with instant suspicion. "Who are you?" she demanded. "And where are you taking me?" Mrs. Watterson smiled again, somewhat uncertainly this time. There is something about Sahwah's direct gaze that is a trifle disconcerting.

"I am a friend of your uncle's"--she told the falsehood glibly--"and I am taking you back to him."

"My uncle?" echoed Sahwah, wonderingly. "Taking me back to him?" She was completely at sea. Mrs. Watterson did not answer. She looked away, over the green fields they were passing. She was having visions of the reward.

Sahwah clutched her arm. "I don't believe it," she said. "I don't know you. Stop the car and let me out." Mr. Watterson drove a little faster. Sahwah rose in the seat and looked as if she were about to cast herself headlong from the car. Mrs. Watterson took a firm hold of her coat and pulled her back into the seat.

"Sit right where you are, Margery Anderson!" she said. "We will let you out when we turn you over to your uncle in Chicago and not before."

Sahwah looked petrified. Margery Anderson! "You've made a mistake," she said. "I'm not Margery Anderson."

"Don't tell lies, my dear," said Mrs. Watterson. "You are Margery Anderson." And she drew the handkerchief from Sahwah's pocket and held it before her eyes with a triumphant flourish. Sahwah was so overcome with astonishment that she could not speak for a moment and it was just as well that she could not, or she might have explained how she came to be carrying Margery's handkerchief and that would have revealed the whereabouts of the real Margery.

Mrs. Watterson was triumphantly quoting from the newspaper article: "Tall, slender, brown eyes and hair, one upper front tooth shorter than the remainder of the row--"

Sahwah, while actually resembling Margery no more than red-haired Hinpoha did, yet fitted the description perfectly!

An idea had come into Sahwah's mind. She abandoned her half-formed plan of jumping from the car the moment it should slow up for any reason. Since these people insisted that she was Margery Anderson in spite of all she could say to the contrary, well and good, there was so much less chance of Margery's being discovered. After all the trouble they had taken so far to return the girl to her mother it would never do for her to betray her. So she sat silent under Mrs. Watterson's fire of cross questioning as to where she had been since running away, which Mrs. Watterson took for conclusive proof that she was Margery.

"Did you say my--my uncle was in Chicago?" Sahwah asked at last.

Mrs. Watterson replied affirmatively. Sahwah was inwardly jubilant but the expression of her face never altered. It was all right as long as they were taking her to Chicago. Once confronted with Margery's uncle, if he were there, the truth would come out and she would be free to go

as she pleased. Then she could go directly to the Carrie Wentworth Inn and await the arrival of the others. She chuckled to herself, as she pictured the meeting between this man and woman and Margery's uncle and their discomfiture when they discovered that they had bagged the wrong bird. Sahwah is keen on humorous situations.

But how was Nyoda to know that she was safe in Chicago? She might spend endless time looking for her, nearly wild with anxiety, thinking some misfortune had befallen her. Sahwah puzzled awhile and then her originality came to her rescue. Somewhere on this very road Nyoda had vanished the night before, and she herself had walked, as she supposed, in a straight line from the gate. She did not know that the light of the strange automobile she had seen from the barn had lured her across to an entirely different road. Well then, she reflected, it was reasonable to believe that Nyoda would be making inquiries for her along this road. Very well, she would drop a clue. With the swiftness of chain lightning she whipped her little address book out of her pocket and wrote on a leaf:

"To those interested:

Picked up by tourists. On way to Carrie Wentworth Inn, Chicago.

Sarah Ann Brewster."

For obvious reasons she made no mention of having been mistaken for Margery Anderson.

She tied the address book in the corner of her green veil while Mrs. Watterson looked on curiously. Then she tied the veil around her hat to give it weight and threw it out of the car into the road just in front of a house. The green veil shone like a headlight and could not fail to attract attention. Thus someone would get the information that would eventually reach Nyoda. Then, Sahwah-like, having overcome her perplexities, she settled down to enjoy her trip. Surely a worse fate might have befallen her, she decided, after being lost from her companions, than to wake up and find herself being hurried toward the city which had been her destination in the first place.

At that time Sahwah thought that the fates were kind to her, but ever since she has declared that they had a special grudge against her in making her miss the spectacular finish of our trip to Chicago. Sahwah, who was the only one who would really have enjoyed that exciting ride, was doomed to a personally conducted tour. I consider it unfair myself. But was there a single feature about the whole trip that was as it should have been?

Sahwah's ride to Chicago was tame enough although the circumstances of it were rather melodramatic. She did not make any thrilling escape such as jumping from the moving car onto a passing train the way they do in the movies, or shrieking that she was being abducted and, as a result, being rescued by a handsome young man who became infatuated with her on the spot and declared himself willing to wait the weary years until she was grown up, when he could claim her for his own. That was the trouble with our adventures all the way through; while they were thrilling enough at the time they were happening, they lacked the quality that is in all book adventures, that of having any permanent after-effects. While there were several men mixed up in our trip none of us came home with our fate sealed, that is, none of us but---

But I am rambling again. It is as hard for me to keep on the main track of my story as it was for the Glow-worm to stay on the sign-posted highway. If I am not careful I will be telling the end of it somewhere along the middle, and that would be rather confusing for the reader who likes to turn to the back of the book to see how things come out before beginning the story. Nyoda said I should put a notice in the frontispiece saying that the end was on page so-and-so instead of the last chapter, and save such readers the trouble of hunting for it. As it is, I am afraid the last chapter will be crowded with afterthought incidents which I forgot to put in as I went along, and which should really be part of the story. But after all, I suppose it is immaterial in what order they come, for, by the time the reader has finished the book she will have them all, which is no more than she would have done if they had all been fitted together in the proper order. And she always has the privilege of rearranging them to suit herself.

Mr. Watterson, as well as his wife, had doubtless been picturing to himself the dramatic moment in Mr. Anderson's office, when his niece should be turned over to him. He began to look important and self-conscious as they entered the city. Both he and his wife looked at the people around them in the street with a you-don't-know-whom-we-have-in-this-car expression, while Sahwah put on a very doleful countenance. Secretly she could hardly wait for the meeting to take place. They crossed the city and began threading their way through the down-town streets, crowded with the traffic of a busy week afternoon. Mr. Watterson, thinking of the coming interview on Michigan Avenue, failed to notice that a traffic policeman was waving peremptorily for him to back up from a crowded corner. The result was that he became involved in the line of vehicles which was coming through from the cross street and rammed an electric coupe containing two ladies and a poodle. The coupe tipped over onto the curb and the ladies were badly shaken and the poodle was cut by flying glass, or the ladies were cut by the flying poodle, I forget which. Mr. Watterson and his party emerged from the crush under the escort of a police officer who directed the finish of the tour. Their destination was the police station.

CHAPTER XII.

"What a tale of adventure we will have to tell Nyoda when we find her," said Gladys, as the Striped Beetle followed its nose Rochesterward. "It will make Sahwah green with envy. She is always so eager for adventure. And there never was such a combination as we have experienced. First, we picked up a girl in trouble, then we got quarantined; next, we lost our trunk and followed a man all the way to Indianapolis, thinking that he had it, which he didn't; then we were robbed of all our money and the Striped Beetle at one fell swoop, and were stranded on a country road without a cent or a drop of gas and had to spend the night in the car. There certainly never was such a chapter of events. The Count for the next Ceremonial will be a regular book.

"I wonder what the girls in Rochester have been doing all this time while they have been waiting for us?"

"Migwan's writing poetry, of course," said Hinpoha, "and Sahwah's

getting into mischief and Nakwisi's staring into space through her spy-glass. It's easy enough to guess what they are doing."

"Well, anyway, they know why we were delayed," said Chapa. "You got a second wire off to Nyoda before the storm?"

"Yes," said Gladys, "I sent it right after I wired for money."

Hinpoha sat silent for a long time. "A penny for your thoughts," said Gladys. "I can't help thinking about the scarf," said Hinpoha. "I brought it along because I was afraid something would happen to it if I left it behind, and here we had to lose it on the way. I would rather lose anything than that." And she sighed and looked so woe-begone that it quite affected the spirits of the others.

"Nyoda can help us find the trunk," said Gladys confidently, thinking with relief as they neared Rochester that Nyoda would soon be at the helm of the expedition again. This thought filled them all with so much cheer that even Hinpoha brightened up. She ceased thinking about the scarf and looked at the flying landscape.

"As a sight-seeing trip this has been somewhat of a failure," she said. "And I had intended making so many sketches of the interesting things we saw on the way to put into the Count, but the only thing that comes to my mind now is the picture of ourselves, always standing around wondering what to do next."

"You might draw a picture of the pain you had from eating green apples," suggested Chapa.

"That pain was about the only real thing about the whole trip," said Hinpoha. "All the rest seems like a dream."

Hinpoha began idly sketching herself running away from a large apple on legs which was pursuing her. And that is the only picture we have of the whole trip!

The girls got to Rochester about noon and went immediately to Number 43 Main Street. Mrs. Moffat came to the door and when she saw the girls in tan suits and green veils she closed it all but a crack.

"My rooms are all taken," she said, coldly.

"We don't want rooms, we want someone who is staying here," said Gladys. "Is Miss Kent here with three girls?"

"No, she isn't," said Mrs. Moffat "They came here as bold as brass, but you can bet they didn't stay long after I found out about them. Do you belong to her company, too? You're dressed just like the rest of them."

"Why yes, we belong to her party," said Gladys, bewildered beyond words at this reception. "Will you please tell us what--"

But Mrs. Moffat closed the door in their faces with a resounding bang and no amount of ringing would induce her to open it again. The girls were simply staggered. What could be the meaning of the woman's words? "You can bet they didn't stay long after I found out about them." After she found out what about us? When had we left the house and where were we now? They stood around the Striped Beetle irresolutely.

"If she only hadn't shut the door in our faces before we could ask some more questions!" said Gladys. "I don't suppose it would do any good to try again; she'd do the same thing a second time."

Just then a small boy came whistling down the street and Gladys had an idea. Getting the girls quickly into the car she drove down to meet him. When they met him they were well away from the house. Gladys called him to her. "I'll give you ten cents," she said, "if you'll go to Number 43 Main Street and ask the lady where the girls in the tan suits, who stayed at her house, went when they left. Maybe you had better go around to the back door," she added.

"Give me the ten cents first," said the boy, squinting his eyes shrewdly.

"Not until you bring back the answer," said Gladys. "I won't go unless you give me a nickel first," he maintained, firmly. Gladys gave him the nickel and he departed in the direction of Number 43. Still keeping out of sight of the house, they awaited his return. In five minutes he was back.

"She says she doesn't know where they went," he said, speaking in an unnecessarily loud voice, the way young boys do. "She says she doesn't keep track of rogues. Where's the other nickel?"

Stupefied, Gladys gave it to him and he ran off down the street "What did he say?" she gasped. "She doesn't keep track of rogues? She turned them out of the house when she found out about them? Whatever has happened? What made her think the girls were rogues? And where did they go?"

They were standing almost within a stone's throw of Number 22 Spring Street, where we had gone from Mrs. Moffat's, but, of course, there was no sign on the house to tell them we had been there.

"Well," said Gladys, "they were here in Rochester, that much we know, and perhaps they are here yet. Somebody must have seen them. Where do you think we had better go to inquire?"

"Do you see a candy store anywhere?" asked Hinpoha. "Sahwah would surely have to buy some candy if she saw any. Whenever I lose her downtown at home I go straight to the nearest candy store, and I invariably find her, standing on one foot and unable to make up her mind whether she should buy chocolates or Boston wafers."

Accordingly, they visited each of the three candy stores on Main Street, and Hinpoha bought a mixed collection of stale chocolates and peppermint drops while they were making their inquiries, but they came out about as wise as they went in. The tan quartet they were seeking had evidently not invested in candy. "Sahwah's either reformed or short of cash," said Hinpoha, decidedly. Which half of that statement was true at that particular moment the reader already knows.

Next, they reached the "department" store which carried everything from handkerchiefs to plows. The proprietor started when they entered and looked keenly at their suits. To their questions about the other four he replied that he hadn't seen them, and if he had he wouldn't know where they were now.

"What a queer thing to say!" exclaimed Gladys, when they were outside once more. "'If he had seen them he wouldn't know where they were now.' It sounds almost like what the woman said, 'She didn't keep track of rogues.' What on earth has happened?"

While they were standing there the boy to whom they had given the dime came walking by again. He walked past several times, and finally he stood still near them. "Say," he called, "will you give me another dime if I tell you something?" He was very red-headed and very freckled, and his eyes were screwed up in an unpleasant squint which might have been dishonesty and might have been the effect of sunlight, but, at any rate, they weren't much taken with his looks. Still, he might be honest after all.

"What do you know?" parried Gladys.

"I saw the girls you're looking for," he said.

"Where?" asked Gladys, eagerly.

"Give me the ten cents first," he demanded. Gladys gave him a dime. "They had their car fixed at the garage over there," he said. "They came in with a lamp and a fender smashed. I was in the garage and I saw them. They were talking to a young fellow on a motor-bike. Afterward, I seen them leaving town and pretty soon I seen the fellow starting after them."

"What day was that?" asked Gladys.

"It was Thursday morning when they came in," he said, "and it was Friday afternoon when they went out."

Friday afternoon! And that was Saturday! The girls hastened over to the garage and inquired about the Glow-worm.

"There was a car like that in here Thursday morning," agreed the proprietor. "The right headlight and the right front fender were broken. They had run into a limousine in the fog the night before. I had it all fixed up by three in the afternoon and they came and got the car, but pretty soon they brought it back and said they weren't going to leave town that night. One of the girls was sick, they said. They got it the next morning and I haven't seen them since. But I heard them tell a young fellow that came in to get his motorcycle looked over that they were going to Chicago. By the way, you say there were four girls in tan suits. There were five when they brought the car in in the morning."

Well might the girls be puzzled by the three things they had found out that day.

First. Nyoda and the other girls were considered rogues by the woman at Number 43 Main Street.

Second. There were five girls in the Glow-worm instead of four.

Third. Nyoda had gone on to Chicago instead of waiting for them as they had requested in their message and had left no word for them.

"It's as clear as mud," said Hinpoha, who was plunged into deepest gloom again, now that Nyoda was not there and there was no one to advise them what to do about the trunk.

"Did she get our telegram?" wondered Gladys. "We might go down to the office and find out if it was delivered."

The first one was delivered, they were informed. The messenger boy who had delivered it (the company had only two) was in at the time and he testified that he had gone to Number 43 Main Street and was told that the parties had left, and he was on his way back to the office when he saw them standing in the road beside the automobile and gave it to them. He knew them because he had been delivering a message in the hotel the day before when they had come there and asked for rooms, and he had overheard the clerk telling them to go to Number 43 Main Street because the hotel was filled with convention delegates. He also said that there were five girls in the party instead of four. But no second telegram had been received at the office.

Gladys rubbed her head wearily. The puzzle was getting deeper all the while. For the hundredth time she wondered what could have induced Nyoda to keep running away from them like that. Nyoda, who was the chaperon of the party, and who had promised her mother that she would never let the girls out of her sight!

"Well, if Nyoda's gone to Chicago," she said, "there's nothing left for us to do but go too, although I don't know what to make of it."

So, puzzled and perplexed, they looked up the route to Chicago from Rochester and set out to follow it.

"We aren't very good hounds in this game," sighed Hinpoha, "or we'd have run down our hare before this."

"But it's such an uncommonly fast hare," sighed Gladys. "And it leaves such amazing and apparently contradictory footprints."

"Hi," said Chapa, "look at the crowd in this town. What do you suppose has happened?" In fact, the streets of the village through which they were passing were choked with vehicles of every kind and the sidewalks were crowded with people.

"It's a band," said Hinpoha, "I hear the music."

Mr. Bob began to quiver with excitement and whine, and Hinpoha caught him firmly by the collar and held him so he could not jump out again.

"It's a circus parade!" cried Gladys. And sure enough, it was. From a side street the crimson and gold wagons began to stream into the main street.

How it happened they were never able to tell, but the next thing they knew they were in the line of the parade and were being swept along with the procession. They could not turn out because the street was too narrow. They had to keep going along, behind a huge towering wagon with pictures of ferocious wild beasts painted on its sides, which drew shrieks of excitement from the children on the sidewalk, and just ahead of the line of elephants. Gladys slowed the car down to a crawl and wondered every minute if she could keep it going so slowly. They could

easily be taken for a part of the circus, for the Striped Beetle is rather a conspicuous car outside of the fact that it had the Winnebago banner draped across the back, and besides the girls were all dressed alike.

"What do you suppose they are?" they heard one small boy shout at another.

"Look like snake charmers," answered the second. Hinpoha giggled. "That's meant for you, Gladys," she said. "Tain't either snake charmers," said a third small boy. "It's the fat lady." And he pointed directly at Hinpoha. Gladys laughed so she nearly lost control of the car while Hinpoha turned fiery red.

Without warning the elephant directly behind them thrust his trunk into the car and picked up Medmangi's camera, to the immense delight of the crowd on the sidewalk. After much prodding from his rider he released it again, dropping it safely into Medmangi's lap. All the rest of the ride Medmangi kept her head over her shoulder so she could watch what the beast was doing. He kept blinking at her knowingly, and every few minutes he would extend his trunk toward the car in a playful manner and send her into a panic, and then he would drop it decorously to the ground like a limp piece of hose, with a sound in his throat that resembled a chuckle.

"Poor beast," she said, after watching him plod rather wearily along for several blocks, "a circus life is no snap."

"He's better off than we are," said Hinpoha crossly, "for he has his trunk, and that's more than we have." Hinpoha's temper had been slightly ruffled by her having been mistaken for the fat lady.

"We'd still have our trunk if we carried it in the front the way he does, instead of in the back," said Medmangi.

Mr. Bob was nearly barking his head off at the shouting boys, and about drove the girls frantic with his noise. Gladys's hands were shaking as she held on to the steering-wheel, while Hinpoha vainly tried to silence him. Chapa dared Medmangi to reach out her hand and touch the elephant's trunk and she did so. The elephant sneezed a sneeze that nearly unseated his rider and blew Chapa's hat off. Medmangi screamed and ducked under the seat, thinking that the beast was about to attack her. Gladys turned around to see what she was screaming at and just then the red and gold mountain ahead of her stood still for a minute, with the result that she bumped into it. It resounded with a hollow clang and something inside set up a fearful roaring like a whole jungle full of wild beasts. Then the small boys shouted worse than ever and the perspiration stood out on Gladys's forehead.

"Stop that dog barking, or I shall go wild," she said.

After numerous ineffectual commands and shakes, Hinpoha rolled Mr. Bob in one of the robes, which nearly smothered him, but produced the desired result. Save for a few smothered growls and "oofs" nothing more was heard from him.

Then, as Hinpoha always said afterward, after the parade the real circus began. The man-killing anaconda got loose. How it happened no one ever found out, but the first thing anybody knew, there he was,

tearing down the middle of the street like an express train. "How does he go so fast without wheels?" gasped Gladys, as he shot by them.

Then there was a scene of pandemonium. The crowd tried to scatter, but it was packed in so closely between the buildings and the street that there was no place to scatter to. Most of the stores had been closed in honor of the greatest show on earth, and the thieves that accompanied it and the people found only locked doors when they tried to enter the stores. Shrieks filled the air. The whole line of elephants began trumpeting.

"Oh, if we could only get out of this," cried Gladys.

The next minute they were out of it, but in a manner they had not foreseen. For down from one of the painted wagons a man leaped directly into the Striped Beetle, picked Gladys up as if she had been a feather, lifted her over the back of the seat into the tonneau and took the wheel himself. Round went the Striped Beetle into the side street through a gap in the line of wagons and after the snake. The scattering of the people told the trail it was taking, and a low cloud of dust lengthening rapidly along the road showed that it was still in the middle of the street. Up one street and down another they flew, as fast as the Striped Beetle would go, with the snake always a length ahead of them. At last, it darted across the sidewalk, up the front walk of a brick mansion, up the front steps and in at the open front door.

Wild screams from within indicated that his presence had been observed. The next instant two maids tried to issue from the door at the same instant and stuck there in the doorway, fighting to get out, until both were shot out as from the mouth of a cannon by the impact of the body of a man, coming behind them down the stairs. They rolled down the steps, picked themselves up, and rushed out of the gate and up the street, closely followed by the man in shirt sleeves, shouting wildly that it was only a drop he had taken for his rheumatism, but he would never take another. Shaken and breathless as they were, the girls laughed until they cried at the trail of superstitious terror left by the man-killing anaconda. The man who had taken such cool possession of the Striped Beetle jumped out and followed the snake into the house. When he returned some five minutes later the man-eater was wrapped around his body in great coils. Gladys got one look at the monster which the man evidently intended placing in the car, and then she was over the back of the seat and behind the steering-wheel, and the Striped Beetle went gliding off down the street.

"There's one thing I object to being, and that's careful mover of a circus," she said through her teeth. She was still too breathless to talk properly. "I'd just as soon take the man back to his wagon, but I won't sit beside a snake. There's nothing in the etiquette book about how to behave toward them and I'm afraid I might do the wrong thing and rouse his ire."

We were well into the country before she slackened her dizzy pace and the circus and the man-killing anaconda were left far behind. Hinpoha was still giggling about the man who thought he was seeing snakes and had forgotten all about poor Mr. Bob, who was still wrapped in his muffling blanket. A convulsive movement of the roll in her arms brought her back to earth and she undid the bundle in time to save him from being completely smothered. All the rest of the trip Mr. Bob retired under the seat every time anyone touched that blanket.

Later in the afternoon they stopped for gasoline and while the tank was being filled were entertained by the loud-voiced conversation of two men who were standing against the wall of the gasoline station.

"But I tell you it isn't my trunk," said the first, "and I'm not going to carry it. The rear end of the car hits the bumpers now every time we strike a bump in the road and I won't have any unnecessary weight back there."

"Oh say, be a good sport and carry it," said the second man. "It's a good looking trunk and I can get something for it when we get back to the city. But I hate to pay express on it."

"How did you get it, anyway?" asked the first man.

Gladys, who had pricked up her ears at the word "trunk" and was intently listening to the above conversation, was disappointed in not hearing the end of it. For, with the question just recorded the two men moved across the street toward a car which stood there. Just then the tank of the Striped Beetle was filled and they were released. Gladys steered across the street just as the engine of the other car started up. But she had caught a glimpse of the trunk under discussion, standing on the unoccupied rear seat of the car, and there, full in the sunlight, were the initials GME, Cleveland, O. Without a doubt it was her trunk.

The other car gained speed rapidly and began to draw away from them. Gladys put the Striped Beetle on its mettle and followed. They passed through several towns at the same high rate of speed, never gaining on the car ahead of them until it stopped in front of a hotel in one place. Gladys also stopped. She jumped out of the car and was alongside the other before either man was out. She began without preliminary. "Excuse me," she said, "but we have lost our trunk from our car and the one you have is exactly like it. Would you mind telling me whether it is your own or not?" The two men looked at each other.

One of them, the one who had objected to carrying the trunk, flushed red and looked uncomfortable. As he was driving the car it was to him that Gladys had addressed her remarks.

"It's not mine," he answered. "It belongs to Mr. Johnson, this gentleman here."

"Yes, it's mine," said the man referred to, as if daring her to dispute his statement.

Gladys was nonplused. There was something queer about their possession of the trunk she knew from the conversation she had overheard.

"You say your name is Johnson?" she asked. "Then how does it come that you have the initials GME--my initials--on your trunk?"

The man glared at her in silence. A crowd began to gather around them on the sidewalk. A policeman elbowed his way to the front. "What's the matter here?" he asked.

"Lady says the man stole her trunk," replied one of the bystanders.

Gladys grew hot all over when she heard that, because she had not said a word about the man's having stolen the trunk, although that thought was uppermost in her mind.

"How about it?" asked the policeman.

"It's none of your business," growled the man addressed as Mr. Johnson. "That's my trunk, whether those are my initials or not. It was given me in exchange for something else."

"But I believe it's mine," said Gladys, looking helplessly around the circle of faces. "It was stolen off our car in Ft. Wayne."

"It was no such thing," said Mr. Johnson, hotly. "We'll soon find out," said the policeman. "What was in your trunk, lady?"

Gladys described several articles which were inside, and mentioned that it was lined with grey and had the same initials on the inside of the cover.

"Open the trunk," said the Solomon in brass buttons.

Mr. Johnson had no key, which was another suspicious fact. Gladys produced her key and unlocked the trunk. It was absolutely empty. There was the grey lining all right and the initials on the inside of the cover, GME, Cleveland, O.

"Disposed of the contents," said a voice from the sidewalk.

Hinpoha, who had been on a pinnacle of hope for her scarf ever since they had recognized the trunk, slumped into despair again when she saw that it was empty.

"Is that your trunk, lady?" asked the policeman.

"It looks like it," said Gladys.

"It answered her description all right," said the voice in the circle.

"Where did you get the trunk and from whom?" asked the policeman of Mr. Johnson.

"None of your business," replied that individual, with a savage look. "But it's mine, I tell you."

Here his companion pulled out his watch and uttered an exclamation.

"Give her the trunk and come along," he said, in a stage whisper. "We'll never make it if we stand here bantering all day."

Scowling like a thundercloud, Mr. Johnson gave the trunk a savage kick as it stood on the sidewalk and got back into the car, snapping out that it was his and never would have given it up if he wasn't in such a tearing hurry. The grey car glided away in a cloud of dust and the policeman lifted the trunk to the rack of the Striped Beetle.

"Fellow stole it, all right," rose the murmurs on every side, "or he wouldn't have been so willing to give it up. Probably threw the contents away. Well, you've got the trunk, lady, and that's worth more

than what was in it."

Hinpoha could not agree with this, of course. That scarf was worth more in her eyes than the price of a dozen trunks, and she was not very much overjoyed at having the trunk returned without the scarf, for it was certain now that the contents were stolen and would never be recovered.

They arrived in Chicago during the afternoon and went directly to the Carrie Wentworth Inn. As they got out at the curb a man lounged down from the doorway and approached them. "You are under arrest," he said, quietly.

"Arrest!" gasped Gladys, thinking of all the traffic rules she might have broken in crossing the busy corner they just passed. "What for? And who are you, anyway, you're not a policeman."

The man opened his coat and showed an official badge. "I'm a policeman all right, you'll find," he said, calmly.

"What have we done?" gasped Gladys. The trunk was in her mind now. What if it were not theirs after all and they were to be accused of stealing it!

"You are wanted in connection with an attempt to steal a diamond necklace from the home of Simon McClure," said the detective, for such he was.

"What?" said Gladys, in sheer amazement. "I never heard of such a person."

"Tell that to the police," said the man facetiously, "and in the meantime, just come along with me." He got into the car and motion them to follow. Too much dazed to resist, they obeyed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Sahwah's vanishing from the car was so uncanny and mysterious that, for a few minutes, we could think of nothing but a supernatural agency. The wind was like the wail of a banshee, and to our excited eyes the mist wraiths hovering over the swamp were like dancing figures. The croaking of the frogs was suddenly full of menace. They were not real frogs croaking down there in the mud; they were evil spirits dwelling in the swamp and they held the secret of Sahwah's disappearance. Shudders ran up and down our spines and the perspiration began to break out in our faces.

"Did Sahwah get into the car again after she helped you open the gate?" asked Nyoda.

At the sound of her voice our fear of the supernatural vanished and we were back to reality again. We were lost on a lonely road, it is true, but it was a (more or less) solid dirt road in the misty mid-region of Indiana, and not a ghoulish pathway in the misty mid-region of Weir.

We all declared Sahwah had gotten into the car.

"She couldn't have," maintained Nyoda. "We haven't stopped since then and she couldn't have fallen out while we were going without making a splash that would have sent the water over the car."

"It's nearly a foot deep most of the way." We thought hard about the circumstances attendant upon our getting back into the car and it came to us that we were not positive, after all, that Sahwah had been with us.

"That wind--don't you remember?" said Nakwisi. "It whipped the corner of my veil into my eye and I couldn't open it again for some time after we started."

I remembered the wind. It had wrapped my veil around my face so that I couldn't see anything, and in my blindness I had slammed the door on my finger, and the pain made me forget everything else. It hadn't been a propitious time to count noses. I had dropped into the corner of the seat trying to get my finger into my mouth through the folds of my veil, and the effort not to cry out with pain made me faint. I had not even noticed when the car started. Margery was on the front seat with Nyoda and they had thought, of course, that Sahwah was in the back with Nakwisi and me. Well, it was evident that she wasn't.

"Poor Sahwah," said Nyoda. "Such a night to be waiting at the gate!"

"Backward, turn backward, Glow-worm, in your flight,
Rescue poor Sahwah from her muddy plight!"

I spouted.

Which was easier said than done. That road was built for traveling ahead and not for turning. On one side was the swamp and on the other a steep drop off into a lake.

"We're in the straight and narrow path all right," said Nyoda, viewing the landscape. Then she sarcastically began to quote from a well-known automobile advertisement which emphasized the superiority of a long wheel base, whatever that is. "The Glow-worm simply won't make the turn," she said. "Here's one instance when the worm won't turn."

"It's a long worm that knows no turning," I misquoted.

Nyoda tried again, and this time, with its rear wheels in the swamp and its front lamps hanging over the precipice, the Glow-worm did turn. We were limp as rags from the strain by the time we were safely back in the road. I had been trying to make up my mind which would do the least damage to my clothes, landing in the swamp or in the lake, and had just about decided on the lake as the lesser of the two evils, as I couldn't get much wetter anyhow, when Nyoda called out, "It's all over."

"If you're speaking of the mud it certainly is all over," I said, feeling of the spatters on the back of the seat.

"Mud baths are hygienic," said Nyoda drily, if anyone can be said to speak drily when they are dripping at every corner. "Be a sport if you can't be a philosopher." Which statement contained food for reflection, as they say in books.

We made our way slowly and splashily back to the mud-wreathed gate, alas, we shoved sir--Gracious! I'm tobogganing into a quotation again! But, like the girl in the poem when the lover comes back to the gate after many years, Sahwah wasn't there. We called, oh, how we did call! With voices as hoarse as the frogs in the swamp.

"We might as well stop calling," said Nyoda, disgustedly. "She won't be able to tell the difference between us and the frogs."

But we kept on calling just the same and a hideous echo from somewhere threw our words back at us in a broken, mocking answer. That was all. We were paralyzed with fear that Sahwah had wandered into the swamp or had fallen over the precipice in the dark into the lake. We turned the lights of the car on the swamp for a long distance, but saw nothing.

I shuddered until my teeth chattered at that lonely stretch of marsh. Given the choice between a graveyard at night and a swamp, I think I should take the graveyard. The nice friendly ghosts that sit on tombstones are so much more cheerful than the nameless and shapeless Things that flit over a swamp at night. The yellow circle thrown by the Glow-worm's lamps was the only thing that linked us to earth and reason. Within that circle the mysterious shadows melted and no spirits dared dance. Then without warning the yellow circle dimmed and vanished, and left us completely at the mercy of the Shapes. The lights had gone out on the Glow-worm.

"Probably short circuited," we heard Nyoda's voice say.
"Where was Moses when the light went out?" I asked, trying to be cheerful.

Margery trembled and clung to Nyoda. The swamp now seemed a living thing that clutched at us with hands. And somewhere in that darkness that pressed around us Sahwah was wandering around lost, or perhaps lying helpless in the water. It is not my intention to dwell on the unpleasant features of our trip any more than I have to. But somehow that night stands out more clearly in my memory than any of the other events. Nyoda says it is because I am gifted, or rather cursed, with a constructive imagination, and see and hear things that aren't there. I suppose it is true, because I can see whole armies marching in the sky, and boats and horses and dragons, when the other girls only see clouds. But I know I heard sounds in that swamp that night that weren't earthly; voices that sang tunes and children that cried, and things that fiddled and shrieked and sobbed and laughed and whispered and gurgled and moaned.

Our hunt for Sahwah had to be given up because without lights we dared not venture forth on the road for fear of running into the swamp.

"Sit up in front, Migwan, and be the headlight; you're bright enough," said Nyoda, cheerfully.

"I'm having an eclipse to-night," I replied.

So we sat still in the Glow-worm not far from the gate which had been the fountain and origin of all the trouble and wished fervently, not for Blucher or night, but for Sahwah or morning. And the reader knows which one of them came.

The rain stopped about dawn and the east began to redden and then we knew there was going to be a sunrise. I have been glad to see many things in my life; but I never was so glad to see anything, as I was, when the sun began to rise that morning after the night of water. Viewed in the magic light of morning, the road was not so bad, while the lake, rippling in the wind, was a thing of beauty, and the swamp was merely a swamp. The gate was right at the corner of a fence which enclosed a very large farm. We could just barely see the house and barn in the distance, set up on a sort of hill. The property ended on this end at the gate, and just beyond it began the descent to the lake. How we had gotten inside that fence the night before we never found out. We must have crossed that entire farm in the darkness on a private road which we mistook for the main road.

In the broad light of day we descended the steep way down to the lake and examined every foot of ground around it. It was all soft mud and if Sahwah had been down there she must have left traces of some kind. But the surface was unbroken save for a few tracks of birds. Clearly, she had not fallen over the edge. Where, then, had she gone. The mud around the gate was such soup that no footprints could be seen. Oh, if the gate could only speak!

"Could she have possibly found her way up to that farmhouse?" I asked. "I don't see how she ever did it in the dark, but still it's a possibility."

So we dragged the gate open again and drove up to the farmhouse. The men were just starting to work in the fields. It must be nice to work where you can see the earth wake up every morning. There are times when I simply long to be a milkmaid. A lean, sun-burned woman was washing clothes out under the trees and she looked up in surprise when we appeared. No, Sahwah had not been there. The mystery was still a mystery. But from the height of the farmhouse we saw what we had not seen from the level of the road, and that was that there was another road running parallel to the one we had been on, skirting the swamp on the other side and bordered by thick trees. From the gate we had thought that those trees grew in the swamp, as we could not see the road beyond it. Sahwah must have blundered into that road in the darkness, we concluded, and thought she was going after us.

We found a narrow lane leading to it, covered with water for most of its length, and there, sure enough, we saw deep footprints in the new road. We followed these, expecting to come upon her sitting in the wayside every minute. But the footprints went on. There were no houses along here; the only building we passed was an empty red barn covered over with tobacco advertisements. A little farther on the road ran into a highway and so did the footprints. A little beyond the turn Nyoda spied something lying in the road. How she managed to see it is beyond me, but Nyoda has eyes like a hawk. It was a button from Sahwah's coat. Sahwah's button-shedding habit is very useful as a clue.

"Here is a button; Sahwah can't be very far now," said Nyoda, cheerfully. A sign post we passed said "Lafayette 20 miles." At last we knew where we were. Deep ruts in the road showed where a car had passed just ahead of us. Then all of a sudden the footprints came to a stop; ended abruptly in the road, as if Sahwah had suddenly soared up into the air. There was a low stone where the footprints came to a stop and around it the mud was all trampled down.

At first we were frightened to death, thinking that Sahwah had been attacked and carried off. But the footprints did not lead anywhere. "Of course, they don't," said Nyoda. "Whoever made them got into that car and Sahwah did too. It's the car that's traveling ahead of us. It stopped and picked Sahwah up." (Just how literally Sahwah had been "picked up" we did not guess.)

"What will we do now?" asked Nakwisi.

"Follow the car," replied Nyoda.

"It sounds like Cadmus and 'follow the cow'," said I.

So we followed the ruts. The sun was up fair and warm by this time and we were beginning to dry off beautifully. I took off my soaked shoes and tied them out on the mud guard where they could bake. Nakwisi went me one better in the scheme of decoration and hung hers on the lamp bracket. Then we hung up our wet coats where they could fly in the wind. Margery was cold all the time and we let her have the exclusive use of the one robe, and the rest of us took turns being wrapped in the Winnebago banner. It was blanket shaped and made of heavy felt and served the purpose admirably. In a moment of forethought Sahwah had taken it down from the back of the car just before we were caught in the storm, and so it had escaped being soaked also.

"This is traveling _de luxe_" said I, stretching out my stockinged feet on the foot rail, and wiggling my cramped toes.

"I don't know about de looks," said Nyoda with a twinkle, "but as long as no one sees you it doesn't matter."

"Who's making puns now?" inquired Nakwisi, severely.

"What's this in the road?" asked Nyoda presently, as we came upon a bundle of bright green.

We stopped and picked it up. "It's a veil just like ours, and a hat," said Nyoda. "It's Sahwah's veil and hat!" she exclaimed, looking in the hatband where Sahwah's name was written. Then she discovered something tied in the veil. It was Sahwah's address book and on the first page was scrawled a message:

"To those interested:

Picked up by tourists. On way to Carrie Wentworth Inn, Chicago.

SARAH ANN BREWSTER."

Beside the signature was the familiar Sunfish which is Sahwah's symbol. There was no doubt about the note being genuine. Besides, it could only be quick-witted Sahwah who would think of leaving a blaze in the road on the slender chance that we would be coming along that way. How it smoothed everything out! Not knowing that we were so close behind her, Sahwah had had a chance to go on to Chicago, and would simply go to our hotel and wait until we came! What a long headed one Sahwah was, to be sure! We could have played hide and seek with each other around those roads for days and never found each other, the way the children did around the voting booth, but by clearing out altogether and going to our place of rendezvous she knew the chances of our meeting were much

greater. How she had managed to find tourists who were on the way to Chicago was a piece of luck which could only have befallen Sahwah.

"I think the best thing for us to do is to hunt some breakfast and then make for Chicago as fast as we can," said Nyoda. "I've been thinking that that would be the best way to find the others. We don't seem to have been very successful in running around the country after them, and if they managed to get the wire we sent to Chicago the other day they will probably find us if we go there too."

"Did Gladys start out with us, or didn't she?" asked Nakwisi, thoughtfully. "I think sometimes it was all a delusion, and there were no more than four of us at the start."

"Sometimes I think so too," I agreed. Was the Striped Beetle a myth? We had almost forgotten our original quest in the chase after Sahwah.

We still debated uncertainly whether we had better go back to Indianapolis and hunt for Gladys, now that we were reasonably certain where Sahwah was, or go on to Chicago and make sure of her, at least. There were so many arguments on both sides that we could come to no decision and so we flipped a coin for it. Chicago won and the die was cast. The next move was breakfast and a place to clean up. We looked as though we had been fished out of the lake. Breakfast we would find in the town of Lafayette, which we were approaching. But we faltered by the wayside as usual. Whether or not that had any bearing on what happened later I don't know, but Nyoda says it would have been the same anyway, only different. Which is rather a neat little phrase, after all, in spite of being impure English. To me our stop over was simply another move in the game of checkers Fate was playing with us as counters.

The thing which caused us to falter by the wayside before we reached Lafayette was a sign on a big, old-fashioned farmhouse near the road which read:

TOURISTS TOOK IN
Meals 35 cents

Nyoda couldn't resist the delicious humor of it. She stopped before the door. "You aren't going to stop here, are you?" I inquired.

"I want to be 'took in'," declared Nyoda. "Just as if all the other places don't do the same thing; only they aren't quite so frank about it. I want to see the creator of that sign. So we drove into the big, shady yard and parked the panting Glow-worm at the end of the long drive under arching trees. Then we went up on the side porch and knocked at the screen door while a black cat inspected us drowsily from the cushioned depths of a porch chair. A bustling, red-faced woman came to the door.

"We're tourists," said Nyoda, "and we want to be took in. We want breakfast."

"Come in an' set on the table," said the woman, and we knew we had found the author of the "Tourists Took In" sign.

Upon our asking for water and soap we were directed to a room on the second floor where a bowl and pitcher stood on a wash-stand and a towel

hung over a chair.

"After having had such a dose of water last night I didn't think I'd ever care to wash again," said Nakwisi, "but that wash bowl's the best thing I've seen yet this morning. Hurry up and give me my turn."

I got through as quickly as possible to stop her clamoring, and while she scrubbed and primped I strolled over to the window, which overlooked the road in front of the house. The high spots were already drying in the warm wind. As I stood there I saw a speck coming down the road which gradually grew to the proportions of a man on a motorcycle exceeding the speed limit by about ten miles. He came to a stop in front of the house with such a jerk that I thought he would pitch off onto his head. He leaned the motorcycle against the porch and came up the steps, and as he did so I recognized the light-haired young man that had been in Rochester when we were. I must say it gave me a little thrill of pleasure to see him again.

The woman had evidently gone to the door in answer to his knock, for we heard her voice the next instant. Every word came up distinctly through the open window.

"Are there five young ladies in tan suits here?" he demanded. The woman was evidently offended at his curt manner. "What business is it of yours?" she asked, in a harsh voice.

"See here," he said sternly, "if you're in league with them and are trying to hide them you'll get into trouble. They're wanted by the police, and I'm here to arrest them."

We looked at each other thunderstruck. Wanted by the police! It was all a part of the strange mystery that had been surrounding us for the last few days. Could they be after us on account of the necklace?

"Tell me at once," persisted the man, "are they here, or did they go by?"

The woman evidently saw visions of her four breakfasts remaining uneaten and consequently un-paid for if she delivered us up, and tried to parley. "There's no such people here," she said brazenly, "they went by over an hour ago."

"They did nothing of the kind," said the young man, "they turned in here. I saw them across the field where the road turns."

"You can come in an' set in the parlor," said the woman firmly, "an' don't you set a foot in the rest of the house, an' I'll bring them to you."

We heard the front door open and close; then a movement in the room below us and the squeak of a chair as somebody sat down. Then we heard the door shut and the footsteps of the woman toward the back part of the house.

"I believe she locked him in," said Nyoda, laughing in the midst of her bewilderment, "and she doesn't mean to produce us until we've paid for that breakfast. It's too bad to disappoint her, but necessity comes before choice."

"What do you mean to do?" I asked.

Margery was as pale as a ghost. "It's my uncle after me," she gasped. "Oh, don't let them get me!"

I was too stupefied to say another word. That the nice young man with the light hair should turn out to be a police agent after us was too much for my comprehension.

Nyoda held up her hand for us to be silent and led us on tiptoe into a room which opened off at one side of the hall. She led us to the window, and we could see that it overlooked the yard on the other side from the dining-room and, that it opened out on a porch roof. A little way off we saw the Glow-worm standing under the trees. Nyoda crept out of the window and swung herself down to the ground by means of a flower trellis and we followed, helping Margery. Then we raced across the yard to the Glow-worm and started it just as a car drove by tooting its horn for dear life so that the sound of our engine was drowned in the noise.

We reached the road without going past the house and Nyoda opened the throttle wide. The last glimpse we had of the house where the tourists were "took in" was of a motorcycle leaning up against the porch. Our one thought was to get Margery safely to Chicago before the detective got her and took her back to her uncle. Nyoda had friends in Chicago who would take Margery in until she could go safely to Louisville in the event we could not take her with us. We knew that it would not be long before the man on the motorcycle would find out that we had escaped and would take the road after us, and we must not lose a minute. Lafayette flew by our eyes a mere line of stores and houses; we hardly slackened our speed going through, and then we began the long run northward to Chicago. We saw people turn to look at us as we rushed along, and then their faces blurred and vanished from sight. Now and then a chicken flew up right under the very wheels and once we ran over one. But we went on, on, unheeding. Then we struck a stretch of soft road and thought for a minute we were going to get stuck.

"Would you get through any better if you threw me overboard?" asked Nakwisi. "I'm pretty heavy." Nyoda only smiled and put on more speed and we went through. Margery's face was chalk white and her eyes were wide with fear; but excited as I was, I was enjoying the flight immensely. This was life. I thought of all the famous rides in history that I used to thrill over; _Paul Revere's Ride, How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix, Tam o' Shanter's Famous Ride_, and all the others. Sahwah will regret to her dying day that she missed it.

Halfway to Chicago, Nakwisi, who was keeping a sharp lookout with her spy-glass, reported that there was a motorcycle chasing us about half a mile behind. The Glow-worm leapt forward a trifle faster under Nyoda's steady hand, but she never flicked an eyelash. Nyoda is simply a marvel of self-control in an emergency.

Soon we could all see the pursuer without the aid of the glass. He was gaining on us rapidly. We were approaching a railroad crossing and there was a train coming. If we had to wait until it went by we would be overtaken surely. Nyoda measured the distance between the train and the crossing with a swift eye and put on the last bit of speed of which the Glow-worm was capable. We bumped across the tracks just as the gates were beginning to go down. A minute later the way behind us was cut off by one of those interminably long, slow moving freight trains,

and on the other side of the barrier was the impotent pursuer.

But the time gained by this lucky incident merely postponed the inevitable end of the chase. When did a loaded car ever outrun a motorcycle? We watched him approaching, helpless to ward off the thing which was coming, yet running on at the top of our speed, hoping against hope that his gas would give out or he would run into something. But none of these things happened and he drew alongside of us and caught hold of the fender.

Nyoda slowed down and came to a stop. "What do you want?" she asked, haughtily.

"Your little game is up," said the man, quietly.

Nyoda faced him bravely, determined not to give Margery up without a struggle. "Will you kindly tell me what you mean?" she asked.

The motorcyclist grinned. "Don't try to play off innocent," he said, severely. "You know as well as I do what I mean. But it isn't you I'm after most," he continued. "It's this one," and he pointed to Margery. Margery buried her face in Nyoda's arm. Nyoda saw it was no use. "Are you looking for Margery Anderson?" she asked.

"Margery Anderson!" said the man, with another grin. "That's a new one on me. But she changes so often there's no keeping track of her. She may be Margery Anderson now, but the one I'm after is Sal Jordan, better known as 'Light Fingered Sal', the slickest pickpocket and shoplifter between New York and San Francisco."

We all stared at him open-mouthed. "Oh, you may have forgotten about it," he said sarcastically, "but I'll refresh your memory." He was speaking to Margery now. "After you robbed that jewelry store in Toledo you got away with such a narrow squeak that the doors of the police station almost closed on you. Your friends didn't dare show themselves in town, so they went riding around in an automobile, pretending they were tourists, and you joined them out in the country somewhere. I've had my eye on you ever since you left Ft. Wayne. But we had word you were going to Indianapolis to carry on another little piece of business and I thought I'd let you go free awhile and catch you with the goods on. But you gave me the slip and didn't go, and I must say you've led me a fine chase. But it's all over now and you'll go along with me to Chicago like a little lamb with all your pretty friends."

He looked us over carefully. "Where's the other one?" he asked, suddenly. "There were five of you before. Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You've sent her back to Indianapolis. Pretty cute, Sal, but it won't do any good. They're watching for her."

We sat petrified, looking at Margery. She had collapsed on the seat with her face in her hands--the very picture of Admission of Guilt. "Margery!" cried Nyoda, "is it true?"

But Margery shook her head. "I don't know anything about it," she said.

"You're mistaken," said Nyoda coolly to the man, "we know nothing whatever about this Sal person." Just then she drew her hand from her pocket with a convulsive movement, and out flew the scarab at the man's feet. He picked it up with a triumphant movement.

"Oh, no, you don't know anything about it," he said. "But you are carrying Sal's scarab, which is the countersign between the members of her gang. As I mentioned before, your little game is up."

"Margery!" said Nyoda the second time, "is it true?" But Margery buried her face in her hands and said nothing.

Our thoughts went whirling in somersaults. The girl we had picked up was not Margery, but "Light Fingered Sal", a pickpocket!

The appearance of the scarab and the scene at the ball when Nyoda had found the necklace in her pocket came over us like a flash. What dupes we had been never to suspect the truth before!

The procession moved on again with the motorcyclist keeping hold of the fender. Thus it was that we came into Chicago, under police escort, and were chaperoned up the steps of the police station.

Once inside, we blinked around with greater wonder than we had at anything which had happened so far.

Against the wall were standing in a row: Gladys, Chapa, Medmangi, Hinpoha, Sahwah between a strange man and woman, four young women we had never seen before but who wore suits and veils exactly like ours, and a girl in a blue suit.

CHAPTER XIV.

Before we had finished staring at each other in stupefied surprise the door opened again, and a woman ran in, at the sight of whom "Sal" darted forward and threw herself into her arms.

"Margery!" cried the newcomer.

"Mother!" cried the girl.

A few steps behind the woman came a man and he looked coldly at the two. "You have forestalled us, I see, Mrs. Anderson," he said, coldly. The girl was Margery Anderson after all! I shall never forget the expression on the light-haired detective's face when he saw Margery rush into that woman's arms. He turned all shades of red and purple and looked ready to burst.

"Confound that Sal!" we heard him mutter under his breath. "She's given us the slip again."

Then we happened to look at Sahwah and the two people with whom she was standing. Sahwah was doubled up with laughter and the man and woman were as surprised looking as the detective. The man reminded me of nothing so much as a collapsed balloon.

It was the queerest police station scene anyone could imagine. Instead of making charges against us the various policemen and detectives all looked bewildered and uncertain how to proceed. Everybody looked at

everybody else; and everybody waited to see what would happen next. And things kept right on happening. The door opened a second time and an officer came in leading a young woman in a stylish blue suit. Her appearance seemed to create a profound sensation with Gladys and Hinpoha and Chapa and Medmangi; they all uttered an exclamation at once and started forward. The one in blue looked at them and then burst into a mocking laugh. The four unknown girls dressed like us and the other one in blue seemed to be good friends of hers for they hailed each other familiarly.

"The game's up, dearies," said the newcomer, gaily. "My, but I did have the good time, though, playing the abused little maiden. Took you in beautifully, didn't I?" she said over her shoulder to Gladys. "Maybe Sal can't act like an angel when she wants to!"

"Light Fingered Sal!" exclaimed the detective who had brought us in, staring at her fascinated. "And all the rest of your company! Can't really blame me for getting on the wrong scent," he remarked, looking from them to us. "The only description I had was the suits and they are identical. Well, you're safe home, Sal, safe home at last," he added, with a grin. Sal and her companions were taken out then and we saw them no more.

Then we heard the officer who had brought her in tell his tale to the detective. A man in an automobile had come to him that morning and said he had been robbed of his pocketbook and watch by a young woman he had picked up on the road. He had run into her and knocked her down and was taking her to her home. After he had put her down at the address she gave him he discovered that his property was missing and returned to the house, but could get no answer to his ring. The officer took note of the address and promised to keep an eye on the place. Later on he saw a young woman come out of the house and enter a near-by pawn shop. He followed her and saw that she was pawning the watch whose description had been given him. He arrested her and discovered she was the famous Light Fingered Sal, whom the police of a dozen cities were looking for. The house was searched, but the other inmates had fled. But it seems that they were fleeing in an automobile and went several miles beyond the speed limit with the result that they were brought into the station, where their real identity was established. They were the four tourists in tan and the one in blue, whom we had blindly followed out of Toledo, thinking they were Gladys and the other girls in the Striped Beetle. Sal still had the man's purse in her pocket when she was brought into the station and the owner was notified of that fact while we stood there.

Again, it was these friends of Sal's who had been ahead of us at the hotel in Ft. Wayne, whom the check man had told us about and who had left for Chicago by way of Ligonier. Together with Sal, they had committed some daring thefts in Toledo stores, and when the police had almost caught them they had escaped in an automobile. There had been no time to wait for Sal; they trusted her to join them somewhere along the road. The police were so hot on her trail that she had to spend the night in the empty storeroom where Hinpoha had found her, waiting until after dark that night to venture out. Then Mr. Bob had blundered in on her hiding-place, followed by Hinpoha. Sal saw her chance of working on Hinpoha's sympathies and so getting out of Toledo, and how she accomplished it we already know. She told her a well fabricated tale of being accused wrongfully of taking a paper from the office safe, and played the role of the helpless country girl in the city, with the

result that the girls took her in tow and set out to find Nyoda. She assumed airs of helplessness until they did not think her capable of lacing her own shoes. All the while she was keeping a sharp lookout for the police along the road. At the same time she found out that the girls were carrying all their money in their handbags.

At first, she had intended staying with them until she got to Chicago, as that was her destination, but the losing of the trunk made them go to Indianapolis, where the automobile races had drawn great crowds from everywhere. She was sorely tempted to break away from the girls there and slip into the crowd, where she could gather a rich harvest; but she had been afraid that the police would be watching for her and decided that the prudent thing would be to go to Chicago. But after they had actually left Indianapolis and she began to think of what she had missed, she wished she had stayed there. She blinded the girls to her real character by pretending to know nothing about any kind of worldly pleasure and amusement, and acted as though she disapproved of everything gay, and Gladys had remarked somewhat loftily that when she had seen a little more of life she would not be so narrow in her views!

Then the girls had seen the flowers growing beside the river and had gotten out of the car to walk among them, leaving her to sit in the car and hold their purses. It was as if opportunity had fallen directly into her lap. The lure of the crowd at Indianapolis was too strong and she started to drive back, leaving the girls minus their money and their car. But some distance down the road the car had come to a stop and she could not make it go on. She did not know that the gasoline had given out. She abandoned it in the road and walked across country until she came to the electric line, which she had taken into Indianapolis. She had a narrow escape from the police there and took the train for Chicago. There she had been run into by the man in the automobile and her fertile brain had whispered to her to feign injury and have him take her home. While she was in the car she had managed to get the watch and purse. Later she tried to pawn the watch and was caught.

The detective, who had started out from Toledo after her had never seen her or her companions and had somehow gotten onto our trail and believed we were the ones. He had made no attempt to arrest us when he first came up with us, because he believed there were still others in her crowd and he wanted to wait until she joined them in Chicago and so get a bigger catch in his net, when he finally drew it in. He had waited around Rochester simply on our account; there had been nothing the matter with his motorcycle at all. We had told him ourselves we were going to Chicago, and then he had heard Nyoda telegraphing to friends at the Carrie Wentworth Inn there. He had told Mrs. Moffat to keep a close watch on us because we were dangerous characters, and she had promptly put us out of the house. The news spread through the town like wild-fire that there was a gang of pickpockets there and wherever we went we were watched. That accounted for the queer actions of the various storekeepers. But then, who had given us the address of 22 Spring Street when Mrs. Moffat had turned us out? That point still remained to be cleared up.

When we abruptly left town in the direction of Indianapolis the detective had followed us, but the storm had thrown him off our track. He had come across us the next day near Lafayette and had made up his mind to hold on to us that time. Our headlong flight when we became aware of his presence drove all doubt away as to our being the ones, and then when he had seen the scarab the last link was forged in the

chain which held us.

The timely arrest of Sal and her companions and the arrival of Margery's mother had naturally wrought sad havoc with the charges upon which we had all been brought into the station, and instead of feeling like criminals we all sat around and talked as if we were perfectly at home in a police station. The facts I am telling you somewhat in order all came out bit by bit and sometimes everybody talked at once, so it would be useless to try to put it down just the way it was said.

When Nyoda finally got the floor, she told about the finding of the scarab and about our being taken into the McClure home and sent down to the ballroom where she later found the diamond necklace in her pocket. This tale created a profound sensation and now it was the turn of the detective who had brought in Gladys and those girls to look foolish. The police asked us the minutest details about the appearance of the servants who had admitted us. We told about the maid Carrie with the black eyes which were not the same height and one of the detectives nodded his head eagerly. "Black-Eyed Susan," he said. "She's one of the crowd we're after." He also recognized the footman with the blue vein in his nose and the chauffeur with the crooked fingers. We were praised highly for having observed those little things.

Then it was that we found the solution of the mystery which had been tantalizing us since the night of the ball, and which we thought we had found when we believed Margery to be Sal. That diamond robbery had been skilfully planned as soon as the invitations for the ball were sent. Three of the crowd were in the employ of Mrs. McClure. It happened that these three did not know Sal and her intimates personally. They had been instructed that on the evening of the ball five young women would arrive in an automobile. They were to be admitted into the house and gotten into the ballroom. Carrie was to do the actual robbery, slipping the necklace into the pocket of one of the five. They would then leave the ballroom and ride away. Their automobile was to be kept in readiness at the door and the way made clear when the time came. The mark of identification of these five was to be a certain scarab which one would carry in her pocket. Naturally, when Nyoda had dropped the scarab out of her pocket that day the chauffeur had taken us for the five. The rest you know.

The only hitch in their plans had been the maid Agnes. Carrie had an idea that she suspected her for some reason or other and was afraid she would think there was something strange in our being admitted into the house and made ready for the ball. She had therefore taken advantage of our drenched condition to pretend that we were merely seeking shelter from the storm. Then, in Agnes's hearing, she had come in and said that Mrs. McClure wanted us to attend the ball. That made everything regular in Agnes's eyes and apparently cleared Carrie of connivance.

The person who had put the scarab into Nyoda's pocket had been still another member of the crowd who had gotten on the trail of the wrong ones. He was to drop it into the pocket of one of the five girls in motor costumes who would be at the Ft. Wayne hotel at a certain time. The real ones found themselves too closely watched by the police to attempt the diamond robbery, and abandoned it, heading straight for Chicago. Thus they went through Ft. Wayne a day before they were expected and did not stop. We came on the day they were expected and got away before he could give it to us. He, therefore, trailed us to Rochester and dropped it into Nyoda's pocket when she sat in the

restaurant eating lunch.

Of course, we did not find out everyone of these facts in the police station that day, although I am telling them as if we did. One of Sal's companions later turned state's evidence and it was from her statement that we got the whole story. When the scarab was produced everybody crowded around it curiously. It was one which was stolen from a private collection in Boston some time before, and occasional rumors had leaked out about it's being used as a sign of identification between members of the gang who were so scattered that they did not all know each other.

The light-haired detective left in a great hurry to get the three servants in the McClure home. I might say right here, however, that he never got them, for they had fled on the finding of the necklace in the jardiner, fearing an investigation.

There was so much that happened that afternoon in the police station that I really don't know what to tell first. I suppose the reader has been wondering all the time what has become of Margery Anderson and how it happened that her mother appeared on the scene just at that time. It seems that she was in Chicago on business and had gone to the office of her brother-in-law, Margery's uncle. He was out and she was waiting for him. While she was there she heard the stenographer take a message over the telephone to the effect that Margery was in the police station, and leaving the office hurriedly she had gone right down, determined to get there before Margery's uncle did. She found Margery as we already know, not in the company of the man and woman, as she had expected, but with us three. When Margery's uncle finally received the message he also hastened to the station, but it was too late. Margery was with her mother and he could not take her away again.

Sahwah came over and stood by us, breaking into giggles every few minutes at the discomfiture of Mr. and Mrs. Watterson, in spite of her heroic efforts to keep a straight face. Her captors left the station very red and uncomfortable after their little business with the police was over.

By the time all our stories were told we were good friends with the police lieutenant and all the officers standing around, who were inclined to be pleased with us because we had helped bring Sal and her crowd into their hands. This would be a feather in their cap, although, of course, we would get no official credit.

Finally, there were only Nyoda and the seven Winnebagos left in the station, and when one of the officers offered to show us around Nyoda accepted the invitation gladly. She is always anxious that we should see as much as possible. Nyoda stood and talked to the matron a long time while we went on through, and when we came back she was invisible. We waited awhile, but she did not appear.

"She's probably waiting for us out in the room where the fat one is," said Sahwah. "The fat one" was her disrespectful way of referring to the police chief. (Sahwah saw me writing this down and corrected me, saying that he wasn't the chief; he was a lieutenant, because we were in a branch station, but I have always thought of him as chief.) So we moved back toward the "main reception-room".

"What's in there?" asked Sahwah, pointing to a closed door. Sahwah,

like the Elephant's Child, was filled with 'satiating' curiosity.

"It's the matron's room," answered the row of brass buttons, who was guiding us.

"May we look in?" asked Sahwah.

"May if you like," answered the row of buttons.

Sahwah quietly opened the door and we looked in. We looked in and we kept on looking. In fact, we couldn't have taken our eyes away if we had wanted to. For there in that matron's office--the matron was not there--stood Nyoda, and there stood the Frog, _and he had his arms around her and he was kissing her_!

By the time we had gotten our breath back again they were miles apart, nearly the whole width of the carpet runner, and the Frog had his goggles off and explanations were in full swing. The Frog was Sherry, Nyoda's camp serenader of the summer before. They had been corresponding ever since and he had been to see her several times, although we did not know it. They had been almost engaged at the beginning of the summer and then they quarreled and Nyoda sent him away.

He was touring the country all by himself in a mood of great dejection and happened to see us in the dining-room at Toledo. He followed so he could be near her. His big goggles and the mustache he had grown during the summer were an effectual disguise. He had kept a respectful distance, afraid to make himself known, for fear Nyoda would order him off. So he had followed us and it was a merry chase we had led him, I must say. When the impudent young man had spoken to us in the hotel parlor at Wellsville he had promptly called him down for it and that had caused the uproar we had heard when we ran out to the garage. Later, he had led us out of the burning hotel to the back window where we made our escape. Then, while we were in the house dressing, he had gone to get the Glow-worm out of the threatened garage. He was driving it across the park to a place of safety when we had seen him and thought he was stealing the car. He wouldn't even take advantage of the great service he had rendered us in piloting us through the burning building to present himself to Nyoda. When we thought he was making off with Margery he was taking a girl to her home in the next town. It seemed that everything conspired to make the poor man appear the villain when he was in reality the hero.

He thought he had lost us that night in the fog, but the next morning he turned around and there we were behind him. When Nyoda tried to overtake him, he fled. But he had followed us to Rochester and it had been he who had given us the address of the woman on Spring Street after Mrs. Moffat had turned us out. He had heard Nyoda arguing with Mrs. Moffat at the front door and thought it was about the price of the rooms; he did not know that we were in any such predicament as we were.

He had found out that we intended going to Chicago and when we disappeared so suddenly from the town he thought we had gone there and had followed, but did not overtake us. Inside the city he had run into Light Fingered Sal and while charitably taking her to her home, as he supposed, she had relieved him of his watch and his money. He had notified the police and some time later had been summoned to the --th precinct station to recover his property. There he had seen Nyoda in

the matrons' office. What happened between that time and the moment when Sahwah opened the door was never made public, but it was evidently highly satisfactory to him.

There remains but one more tangled thread to straighten out. That concerns the trunks. We did not find out the truth until long after. Gladys's trunk had actually been put onto Mr. Hansen's car in Ft. Wayne, but he had lost it on the way and it was picked up by a man who went through Wellsville the night of the fire. In the excitement it was left in the garage, where it was found by the proprietor and sent us in answer to our description. The one which we had left in Wellsville was taken by the salesman of the Curline stuff and returned to Gladys's address several weeks later, rather battered on the outside, but still intact as to contents. Gladys was aghast when she thought of the trunk she had forcibly wrested from the man on the road. She left it there in the police station in the hope that the real owner would get it some day. That was the last we ever heard of it. Whether the man had actually stolen it, and who the initials GME of Cleveland referred to we never found out.

The reason Gladys's second wire to us in Rochester was not received was that she had absent-mindedly written Rochester, N. Y., instead of Rochester, Ind.

Well, as far as adventures are concerned, the tale of our trip is told. The rest was uneventful and the telling of it would be uninteresting, as it would consist mainly of descriptions of scenery and places, which the reader already knows by heart from other books. Sherry hinted strongly that a red car would be a great addition to our color scheme, but Nyoda firmly refused to let him come with us. She had enough to look after when she had us, she insisted, without trying to keep him out of mischief. Besides, ours was a strictly family party and he was not one of the family--yet. So he meekly continued his journey to Denver as originally planned, while we went south to Louisville.

Then once more we followed "along the road that leads the way," the yellow road unwinding like a ribbon under our wheels, but this time we didn't build any Rain Jinx before we started.

THE END.

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