

Roy Lillian Elizabeth

# Natalie: A Garden Scout



Lillian Roy

**Natalie: A Garden Scout**

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**Roy L.**

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# Roy Lillian Elizabeth Natalie: A Garden Scout

## An Open Letter From the Author

Dear Girls Everywhere:

Perhaps you will like these country life books better for knowing that the incidents told in them actually happened to me in my girlhood days. I did not live on a farm such as Natalie's, however, nor was my father a farmer. He liked to "putter" around the acre of ground after business hours, simply because he enjoyed such recreation. I was generally at his heels, and whenever a fruit-tree was being grafted, or a swarm of bees hived, you could always find me there, too, getting in Daddy's way. If I was not in the garden, or at the barnyard, I would be shadowing my brothers who were my seniors. Scouts were unheard of in those days, but we hiked, camped, fished and did all the enjoyable stunts which you Scouts now do.

I have not the space here to tell you of some of the hair-raising "dares" my brothers tempted me to accomplish, but I will have to write them for you to read, some time. However, the stunts and the following results would never be termed ladylike, nor were they graceful. Freckles, tan, and tattered dresses were the bane of my mother's life, and the inglorious title of "tomboy" failed to curb my delight in the freedom of country life. But, dear girls, I stored away a fund of health and experiences that I can now draw upon without bankrupting myself.

A keen desire, which I hope to realize soon, is to have a place like Green Hill, where you girls can come and camp for as long a time as you like. Then we can sit about the campfire and talk about the fun and frolics the out-of-door life gives us. Many a laughable experience will I then tell you. Until that time, dear girls, believe me to be an ardent admirer of and staunch worker for the Girl Scouts.

*Sincerely,  
Lillian Elizabeth Roy.*

## CHAPTER I – NATALIE SOLVES A PROBLEM

“Here comes Natalie Averill, girls!” exclaimed Janet Wardell, as a slender, pale-faced girl of fifteen came slowly down the walk from the schoolhouse door.

“My! Doesn’t she look awful?” said Frances Lowden.

“Poor Nat! I should say she did!” agreed Norma Evaston sympathetically.

“She looks as if the end of the world had come for her,” remarked Belle Barlow, the fourth girl in this group of chums.

“Not only the end of the world, but ‘the end of her rope,’ too,” added Janet, in a low tone so that no one else might hear.

“If it’s true – what mother heard yesterday – the end of Nat’s rope has come,” hinted Norma knowingly.

“What is it?” asked the girls anxiously.

“Nothing new for poor Natalie to suffer from, I hope,” said Helene Wardell, Janet’s younger sister and not a member of the clique of five girls, although she often walked to and from school with her sister.

“Well,” replied Norma, aware of her important news, “it is about the worst thing that can happen to a girl after she has lost mother and father. Mrs. James confided to mother last night that there isn’t a cent for poor Nat. The lawyer said that Mr. Averill kept up appearances but he had no capital. He must have spent all the money he made since Natalie’s mother died four years ago.”

“How perfectly dreadful for Nat!” cried Janet.

“After the luxurious manner of life she has had, too,” added Belle.

“S-sh! Not so loud, girls; she will hear us,” warned Helene, the tender-hearted.

“Did Mrs. James tell your mother what they would do?” whispered Frances anxiously.

“She said she would stay on with Natalie for a time, without salary, as she has learned to love her so. You know she has been her companion for four years! And Rachel declares *she* won’t go even if the world turns upside down,” returned Norma.

“Just like good old Rachel,” declared Belle.

“But they can’t live in New York without a cent of money, you know,” said Janet, with deep concern. “Folks have to pay rent and have something to eat, wherever they are.”

But there was no opportunity to discuss more of Natalie’s problems then, as the girl came up and joined her friends. Her whole carriage denoted utter discouragement, and her face was drawn into lines of anguish.

“Hello, Nat dear! What made you stay in after school?” asked Janet cheerily, placing an arm about the girl’s shoulders.

“I had to tell Miss Mason that I would not finish the term at school,” returned Natalie in a quivering voice.

“No! Why not?” asked several voices.

“Why, I expect to leave the city very soon.”

“Where to?” chorused her companions anxiously.

“Oh, girls! I hate to think of it, it is so awful after all I had hoped to do and be, for Daddy’s sake!” cried the girl, hiding her face in her hands.

Instantly four girls closed in about her and each one had a loving and sympathetic word of encouragement to say to her. In a few moments, Natalie dried her eyes and tried to smile.

“Janet will think it is wonderful, because she always *did* like a farm,” said she. “But the only choice in life now given me, is to move away to an outlandish farm up State, and leave all my friends and favorite pastimes behind. When I think of having to live all my days on a barren bit of land, I wish I were dead!”

Janet tried to change the subject. “What did Miss Mason say when you told her you would not complete the year here?”

“Oh, you know what a faddist she is over that Girl Scout organization! Well, she talked to me of nothing but my splendid opportunities of opening a Country Camp on the farm and renting out the woodland to girls who would be glad to use it.”

“But, Natalie, is it your own farm?” asked Janet and Norma.

“Why, of course! Didn’t I tell you about it?” cried the girl impatiently.

“No, we thought it was someone else’s farm – Mrs. James’, or Mr. Marvin’s, perhaps,” explained Belle, gently.

“It used to be my great-grandmother’s place. Mother was born there, but raised in the city. When grandmother died, Aunt stayed on there until she, too, died. Then it descended to mother, who leased it to a man for ten years. I have never even seen the horrid place, but I know it is a mile from anywhere on the map. Mr. Marvin says it is fine, and *he* wants me to go and live there.”

“It sounds all right, Nat, if the house is habitable,” remarked Janet, the practical girl of the group.

“I told Mr. Marvin to sell it for me, but he says I would be foolish to do that. He says I can live on it for some years and then sell it when I grow up and get more for it than if I sold it in its present condition. He says I could spend my summers there and try to grow strong and happy again, and in a few years he could ask a far better price for the property than would be advisable now. I reminded him of all the families who wanted homes, but he said the cost of building was so high that few sensible investors would consider buying an old house that needed remodelling. So there I am!”

“How big a house is it, Nat?” asked Janet, as a thought flashed through her mind.

“Mr. Marvin motored over there a few weeks ago, but I refused to go with him. Jimmy went, however, and has been raving over the place, ever since. I just had to tell her to keep quiet about it, or I’d run away from her.”

Helene laughed softly: “But that isn’t telling us how large a house you have on the farm!”

“What difference would it make?” retorted Natalie plaintively. “The very size of the barracks is a thorn in my side. It is a two-story affair, with long rambling wings. Jimmy says it is pure Colonial – whatever that means – and declares it is an ideal home.”

“Then, for goodness’ sake, Nat, why are you so glum? Any other girl would jump out of her skin for joy if she were left such a wonderful inheritance,” rebuked Norma gently.

“Can’t you girls understand? It isn’t the house or farm I abhor so much as the isolation I shall have to live in. That splendid auto-tour I planned for the five of us is now out of the question. Even the apartment Daddy and I were so happy in, is too expensive for my income. If I can manage to keep any of my parents’ lovely furnishings, I shall be more than lucky.”

Her hearers were silenced by her pathetic complaint, but their teacher, Miss Mason, now came from the front door of the school and smiled invitingly at them. She was a great favorite with all the girls of her class, and these five in particular. She came straight over and stood with a hand affectionately resting on Natalie’s shoulder as she spoke.

“Have you heard of Natalie’s good fortune, girls?” asked she cheerfully.

“I thought it was fine, but Nat says I don’t understand,” said Janet eagerly.

“I don’t believe Natalie can comprehend the fullness of the cup of opportunity that is handed her, until she sees the place with her own eyes. It is often difficult to visualize the possibilities in an idea from another’s description. If you girls want to have a little outing on Saturday, I shall be delighted to drive you to Green Hill Farm in my brother’s car. He has a seven passenger machine, you know, and will not be home to use it, this week-end,” said Miss Mason graciously.

“Oh, Nat! Won’t that be fine?” exclaimed several girlish voices eagerly.

“It will be a lovely trip, Miss Mason, and I’m sure we will all enjoy it,” grudged Natalie.

“Maybe we can tuck Mrs. James in, somewhere, so she can play major-domo for us when we arrive at the farm,” added Miss Mason.

“Maybe,” admitted Natalie. “That is, if she cares to go again.”

“This is Thursday, so we have to-morrow to make our final plans. If all is well, we can start out Saturday morning about ten,” ventured Miss Mason, leaving no room for argument.

“I’ll ask Jimmy when I go home, and let you know what she says,” said Natalie.

“Where are you girls going now?” asked Miss Mason, with seeming guilelessness, but with intent aforethought.

“Why, Helene and I are going home, and Nat was invited to stay for dinner and spend the evening,” replied Janet. “Norma and Francie are coming over after dinner, and bring Ned Foster and his cousin. They have a motion-picture camera, you know, Miss Mason, and it is such fun taking moving pictures of each other.”

“That will be fine! Natalie will enjoy seeing herself as a screen star, won’t you, Nat dear?” laughingly replied the teacher.

“Oh, I don’t know, Miss Mason! Nothing is worth while any more. I just wish I were dead!” sighed the girl.

“No you don’t, Honey! It is just morbid sorrow that’s fastened itself in your heart. The moment you change your entire present state of mind for a more harmonious one, you will feel like a new being. Now run along with your chums and have a real – r-e-e-l – happy time.” Miss Mason’s joyous nature was contagious, and smiles appeared where intense feelings had drawn faces awry. So it was with Natalie: as Miss Mason turned to go down the street, she stood smiling after her, with a lighter heart than she had carried for many days.

The five girls walked arm-in-arm along the city street regardless of inconvenienced pedestrians who had to give way for them. But four of the girls vied with each other in cheering Natalie into a happy mood, for they felt so sorry for her.

The five schoolmates had known each other for more than five years, and being very near an age and in the same class in school, naturally became intimates. Janet Wardell lived a few blocks from Belle Barlow and Norma Evaston; and Frances Lowden and her brothers boarded at a Family Apartment Hotel, two blocks west of Norma’s home. Natalie Averill, supposedly the wealthiest girl in school, lived on Riverside Drive, in one of the modern apartment houses.

A few years previous to the opening of this story, Natalie’s mother passed away, and Mr. Averill devoted all his love and spare time to his motherless daughter. She was past the age when so much attention could spoil her disposition, but since her father’s death it was all the harder for her to live without such love and pampering. Even the funds that used to provide everything she asked for had vanished, and henceforth she must go without the things that had made her life so pleasant for a few years.

Mrs. James, lovingly called “Jimmy” by Natalie, had accepted the position of companion and mother to the little girl, when Mr. Marvin explained the situation. As Mr. Marvin was one of Mr. Averill’s closest friends, as well as being his attorney, his recommendation of Mrs. James was sufficient.

As for Mrs. James, a lady in birth and training, she knew Mr. Marvin would never offer her the home and charge of anyone that was not her equal in life. Being penniless was no disgrace, but she had found it most unpleasant when she met her old-time friends and could not feel free to accept invitations because of her limited circumstances.

This lovely home with every luxury, and her freedom in time and ways, made the position an attractive one for her. So she had held the reins of government very successfully since Mrs. Averill’s passing, and Mr. Averill’s appreciation of it was shown in his last words.

From perfect health and happy hours with his little daughter, Mr. Averill had suddenly been taken with acute indigestion and in an hour was gone. It was all so unexpected and helpless, that



Natalie had not grasped the meaning of it until the day of the funeral. Then she gave way to hysterics and daily became more morbid and despondent.

Mr. Marvin had confided to Mrs. Mason that, in spite of there being so much ready money on hand whenever it was asked for in Mr. Averill's lifetime, there was nothing left for Natalie's future. When the funeral expenses were paid not a dollar would be on hand for rent, or food, or clothing. There were some rare and expensive paintings, antiques, and rugs, but they would be the only things that could be turned into ready money.

The lawyer had not given a thought to the farm in the Westchester Hills that had belonged to Mrs. Averill's mother, as it had always been mentioned in an apologetic manner. So, naturally, Mr. Marvin believed it to be a tiny patch of poor land with a cottage of some kind on it.

Consequently he was all the more surprised when he opened the deed of the place, and found it was located a few miles west of White Plains, and a mile east of the Hudson Division of the New York Central Railroad. As he read down the printed page of the legal paper and found there were thirty acres of good land, – ten tillable, ten woodland, and ten pasturage, – with a substantial dwelling and some out-houses on it, he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

He telephoned Mrs. James at once, and explained the finding of the deed and what it meant for Natalie's future. He also invited the chaperone and Natalie to go out with him and inspect the property that he might get an idea of the rent he should ask for it – or what price to value it in case he could find a purchaser.

Natalie would not go when the time came, so she knew not what the place looked like. It was enough for her that her dear mother had never wanted to live there and Daddy hardly ever mentioned it. Mr. Marvin could rent or sell it as he liked – but she would not take an interest in it.

To her utter disgust, Natalie found both Mrs. James and Mr. Marvin so delighted with the old farm that neither spoke of a sale, or of renting it. It seemed to be a settled fact that Natalie and her chaperone would move out and live there for the summer.

When the girl heard the verdict, she stormed away from the room and fled to the refuge she had always sought when she had been thwarted in anything in the past. That was Rachel's big brown arms. Rachel had been housekeeper, cook, and nurse, alternately, in the Averill family. And the kind-hearted old colored mammy never failed "her li'l' chile."

But this time, when Natalie wept tears of misery over the idea of going to live on a farm, Rachel explained how much better that would be than to be adopted by a stranger, or have to live in a cheap boarding-school somewhere in the country.

Natalie had not dreamed of such an alternative, and as her old confidante described the hardships of being a poor scholar in a cheap boarding-school, or a handy-help in form of an adopted child in a working family, her tears vanished and a feeling of dread of such experiences caused her to consider the farm with a better grace. But it was not with enthusiasm or cheerfulness that she told her school friends her plans for the future.

So Miss Mason left the girls to enjoy the evening, while she hurried across town until she reached the address on Riverside Drive, where she hoped to find Mrs. James at home.

## CHAPTER II – A SECRET CONCLAVE

“Good-afternoon, Mrs. James,” said Miss Mason cheerily, as she entered the hall of the apartment belonging to the Averills.

“To what happy circumstance do I owe this unexpected call?” asked Mrs. James, taking the teacher’s hand in warm welcome.

“It was quite unpremeditated, and consequently I am unprepared with an answer,” laughed Miss Mason. “But I can confess to being one of those objectionable persons that always want to run other people’s affairs for them. I just left the five girls at the corner of Broadway, and hearing that Natalie would not be home this afternoon, I took advantage of that knowledge to run in and have a talk with you.”

“I am very glad you did, as I have thought of asking your advice about a step Mr. Marvin advises me to take for the child.”

“Perhaps that is the very business I came on. I want to help you run your affairs, you see, so I am here to offer my experiences in certain lines, and then I will try to encourage Natalie to look at a country life with different eyes than she has stubbornly used, recently,” explained Miss Mason.

“Is it about the farm proposition?” asked Mrs. James.

“Yes, I left the girls talking it over, but Natalie seems to think she is giving up all that is worth living for, by going to live at Green Hill Farm.”

“Yes, that is her attitude, exactly! Whereas Mr. Marvin says she ought to be the most grateful girl alive to find she has a lovely home ready-made to go into, instead of moving to a shabby school life where she will have to earn part of her expenses by waiting on table or doing chores,” explained Mrs. James.

“Just so. And because I heard of the poor child’s destitution, I am here to suggest several pleasant and wholesome plans by which she can not only live without cost to herself this summer on the farm, but also make enough money to pay your and her own way in the city next winter. Perhaps you are not interested in such suggestions?” ventured Miss Mason.

“Interested? My dear friend, you come like a blessing from heaven with this news. The only great obstacle to our going to the farm at once was the lack of money to stay there, with Rachel, all summer. No matter where one lives, one has to eat and abide. And eating costs money, and an abode needs furniture. The old house is empty and has to be completely furnished before we can move out there,” explained Mrs. James.

“Well, then, listen to my idea. It has been tried out so successfully before, that I am not afraid to advise you to experiment for this season, anyway. It is this:

“You know what an enthusiastic member of the Girl Scouts’ organization I am? Last year I offered my services free to a camp of girls who wanted to spend the summer away in the woods but had no place to go to without its costing a great deal, and no one would attend them in a camp which would be within their means. Then I happened in and saw how hungry these seven girls were for an outdoor life, so I offered them a corner of the woods on my brother’s old farm down in Jersey. Some day I will tell you the story of our summer down there. It is worth hearing.”

Miss Mason laughed to herself as she stopped for a moment to review mentally that experience. Then she proceeded.

“Now this is my idea: Natalie and the other four girls have been talking of joining the Girl Scouts ever since last fall, when I returned from camp. But they are like so many other well-meaning girls – they never quite reach the point where they act!

“My seven girls who spent the summer in camp with me last year are begging me to take them this year again. I have agreed to do so if we can find a good camp-site not so far from home

as the Jersey farm was. I wish to be nearer a railroad than last year, too. We were more than nine miles from any store, or trolley, so it was most inconvenient to get any supplies.

"If Green Hill Farm is anything like what Natalie described it to me, after school this afternoon, I would rent some of that woodland in a minute. She said the stream ran through the farm at one corner where the woodland watered ten acres. If Mr. Marvin will rent me enough of that land for a camp for my Girl Scouts it will bring in instant returns, and you will not have cause to regret it.

"By having my girls on the ground, I can rouse the interest of Natalie and her friends (if they visit her this summer), and in that way they will want to join my girls. We now have a Troop in process of organization, with the required eight members – a new Scout has joined since last year. These girls are about the same age as our five schoolmates, so there would be no disparity in years. I have been elected as Captain of the Patrol, but we have not yet chosen a Corporal for this year, as our meetings have been very irregular since school examinations began.

"These Girl Scouts became interested last spring, but not one of them attends my school, so I see little of them excepting when they call on me, or I attend one of their gatherings. Now that we are started on founding a Troop, we shall have weekly meetings and all the rest of the programme."

Miss Mason waited to hear if Mrs. James had anything to say about her suggestion, and the latter asked: "Do you think these seven – or eight – Scouts are on the same social plane as Natalie and her friends?"

"Yes, I do, or I would never have suggested their coming into contact with our five girls. They are not wealthy girls, and each one will have to support herself in a short time, but they are fine, – morally, mentally, and spiritually. A few of them are not perfect physically, and that is why I wish to give them another long summer out in the open. It is the best thing a young girl can do to build up her strength and health."

"That is a great relief – to hear they are good girls. I have been very careful of my girl's associations, you know, and now that her father is not present to protect her, I will have to use more precaution and better judgment than ever. This is one of the main reasons I have for urging her to live out of the city for a time."

"My Girl Scouts can be of great assistance to Natalie, if she will show a genuine interest in us. For instance, one of the members of my newly-fledged Patrol lived on a farm all her life before she moved to New York two years ago. She knows everything necessary for light gardening and barnyard stock. If you had any idea of planting the vegetable garden, or keeping chickens, Alice Hastings can show you how to do it."

"I had not thought so far as that – gardening and poultry – but there is a splendid lucrative business for a girl, I should say!" declared Mrs. James.

"Of course!" agreed Miss Mason. "And with a little care and good selection, a garden can be made to keep a houseful of people. Rachel is a good cook, and you are a thorough housekeeper, so what is there to interfere with Natalie having a few good boarders stay at the house during the summer?"

"That was my idea, when I first saw the farm. I told Mr. Marvin that we could ask very good prices and fill the spare-rooms, if Natalie would consent to it. We will need some money for repairs and necessary furniture for the extra chambers, but that is all. We have our housekeeping things, and quantities of linen for all purposes, besides bedroom furniture for five good rooms. I figure that the amount realized on the sale of the Oriental rugs and draperies, the pictures and antiques, would pay for all extras we may need, and give us capital with which to launch a boarding-house for the summer," explained Mrs. James.

"If you could find a number of girls of Natalie's own age to spend the summer with you, would you not feel more at ease about the responsibility of the undertaking?"

"Oh, of course! I am perfectly at home with girls, you know. And they would not demand such attention as adult guests, either," said Mrs. James.

“True! Then why not offer to chaperone a number of paying girls of Natalie’s age for the season? There are so many parents who would like their girls to benefit by a summer in the country, but neither mother nor father can leave home, so the girl has to remain also, because of no suitable guardian to chaperone her!” declared Miss Mason.

“I’m sure your idea is practical. And I will speak to Mr. Marvin about it. If only Natalie would think favorably of the farm plan.” Mrs. James sighed as she thought of the protests and tears she had to contend with whenever the subject was broached to Natalie.

“I’ll tell you what I proposed to the girls just before I left them, then I must run along. I invited them to go out and see Green Hill Farm on Saturday. I said I would get my brother’s car and motor out, so they could judge of the place, – whether it would make a pleasant home for the season or not.”

“How very kind of you, Miss Mason!” exclaimed Mrs. James. “Mr. Marvin’s automobile is too small to carry more than three of us, and then we are squeezed close together. He said he wanted an extra seat added, but everything is so backward this year, the company would not promise to deliver the car at all, if a seat had to be attached. Now this invitation of taking Natalie with her friends is far better than driving her over there alone. It will seem much more desirable to her if her chums praise the farm and house.”

“That was my idea! And while they are roaming about the place, you and I might look over the chambers and other rooms indoors, and average up what might be the income from a number of paying girls,” added Miss Mason.

“What a fairy-godmother you are, Miss Mason!” declared the elder woman. “Natalie always said you were a dear, but I find you a most valuable adviser, too.”

“Mrs. James, who would not move heaven and earth to help a poor little child like Natalie, in her loss and forlorn state? Were it not for you being with her, I think she would have followed her father from sheer lack of interest in life. That is often the case, you know.”

“Yes, I know; but I am sure we have passed the worst phase in her sad experience, and will now turn our backs on the morbid sorrow and face the gladsome light,” said Mrs. James.

“That is one reason she ought to be in the country – where she is free from all memories and can find a new interest in life. But young companions are necessary, too, to suggest daily fun and work to each other.”

“Did the girls seem pleased with your proposal to take them to the farm on Saturday?” asked Mrs. James, anxiously.

“Oh yes, indeed! They were all delighted, so I left them with a date for ten o’clock in the morning. The girls can assemble here and I will call promptly with the car. Now I must really be going.” Miss Mason rose as she spoke, and held out her hand to her hostess.

“All I can say is, you’ll be laying up treasures in heaven for yourself if you give your summer vacation to girls who need the outing. Their gratitude and love will be a crown in the future, that you may well be proud of.”

“I will enjoy myself, too, never fear!” laughed the teacher.

“I wish there were more like you, then!”

“Perhaps we had best not speak to Natalie of our talk this afternoon,” ventured Miss Mason.

“No, I won’t mention your call. And we will let all other things work out naturally, – even the plan of taking girls to board this summer. We will wait and see if Natalie has any plans of her own,” returned Mrs. James.

So the teacher said good-by and left. Both women felt happy and confident that Natalie’s problems were being solved after this confidential chat. And when Natalie came home late that evening she was gayer than she had been for many weeks.

“What do you think, Jimmy!” cried she, as she ran in to kiss Mrs. James.

“I’m thinking it is something good, Honey,” returned the lady.

“Why, Helene’s and Janet’s mother said to-night that if I went to Green Hill Farm to stay this summer she would like to send them with me to *board*! Isn’t that interesting – to get an income out of my friends that way, while they feel that it will be a great favor on your part if the girls can come!”

“I should be very glad to take care of them, Natalie, if you think you would like to have them live with us this season,” replied Mrs. James, wisely refraining from mentioning a word about her talk with Miss Mason.

“And the moment Frances heard of the idea, she said she would coax and *coax* until her mother said she could come, too! That started Norma, naturally! And Belle declared that she would never stay home alone in New York if we all were having fun on the farm. In the end, Jimmy, all five girls were ready to leave home to-night, and start for the farm!” Natalie laughed merrily at remembrance of the eagerness of her friends to go and live on the farm. And Mrs. James was made happy at hearing that care-free laugh, – the first one the girl had given since her father was taken away.

“When Mrs. Wardell heard that I didn’t want to go to the farm, she said I was ‘cutting off my nose to spite my face.’ And she said I wouldn’t act so set against it if I would use a little wisdom and common sense in my thinking over the whole affair. Then Mr. Wardell told me what wonderful times every one has in the summer on a good farm. He said that any Westchester farm in that locality was most desirable. So I need not feel that I was going to live on a poverty-stricken patch of land, because I would be, most likely, within arm’s reach (metaphorically speaking, he said) of plenty of millionaires who loved quiet country life, and found it in the Westchester Hills. So now I am as curious to see my only home as you could want me to be.”

“I’m thankful for it,” sighed Mrs. James. “And I’m thankful to the Wardells for changing your opinions about Green Hill.”

## CHAPTER III – GREEN HILL FARM

Saturday morning Miss Mason drove her brother's car up to the curb before the elegant apartment house where Natalie lived, and motioned the door-man to come out.

"Please telephone to the Averills' apartment and say Miss Mason is waiting in the car. Let me know if they are ready."

The uniformed attendant bowed politely and hurried in to obey the order. In a few moments Miss Mason heard a happy voice calling from the window in one of the upper apartments. She leaned out and tried to look up, but all she could see was a fluttering of several handkerchiefs waved from several hands.

Then the porter came out and smilingly said: "Mrs. James says they will be right down, Miss."

"Thank you," was Miss Mason's reply, and she sat back to wait. But she had not very long for that, as a bevy of merry girls hurried out of the front door and ran across the walk.

"Oh, Miss Mason! Isn't it a glorious day?" called Janet.

"Couldn't be finer if we had ordered it for our trip!" added Belle joyously.

"And what do you think, Miss Mason?" cried Natalie, as happy as the others. "Jimmy had Rachel pack us a lovely picnic lunch so we could spend some time at the farm this noon. Won't it be fun?"

"Indeed it will – especially if that famous cook of yours prepared the goodies, Natalie," laughed Miss Mason.

"Jimmy will be down with us in a minute, Miss Mason," added Natalie; "she just stopped to telephone Mr. Marvin that we were all going to motor out to the farm. Maybe he can come out, too, and join us there."

"That will be splendid, as he can explain matters we may not understand," returned Miss Mason.

"I'm sure there's nothing to understand about a farm," ventured Natalie, laughingly.

"You say that because you never lived on one. But once you do, you will find out that the soil on your garden will have a great deal to do with the success of your vegetables. Even flowers need certain grades of soil before they grow to perfection. If you have a pasture lot on the farm, the quality of the grass will control the grade and amount of milk from the cows; it will prove valuable, or otherwise, to your horses, to the sheep, or other stock. Even the chickens that scratch over the field will show results in the good or poor soil they feed in."

"Why! How very interesting!" exclaimed Janet, wonderingly.

"But that need not bother us, Miss Mason, as vegetables and stock will not come into our lives," laughed Natalie.

Mrs. James had come out of the house and now she heard what Natalie said. "My dear child, one of the main reasons for our going to live on the farm is to offset the high cost of living in the city. By raising our own vegetables and eggs and chickens, we can live for one-tenth of the cost in the city."

"But, Jimmy, not one of us knows a thing about farming!" chuckled Natalie, amused at the very idea.

"Perhaps you don't know anything, but I do, Natalie." Mrs. James spoke gently. "I spent a few years of my early married life on a lovely farm near Philadelphia, dear, and there is not very much that I did not learn while there. To make a success of the investment, I found I had to take hold, personally, and not only supervise the work, but know *how* to do it, and to *do* it if occasion demanded it of me."

"Now it will just come in fine for Nat, won't it?" declared Janet, enthusiastically. Mrs. James and the teacher laughed appreciatively at the remark.

“Do tell us, Jimmy, – did Mr. Marvin say he would try to meet us at Green Hill?” asked Natalie, as the car started.

“Yes, he said he would try to get an old friend to accompany him. He was not sure that she could get away, but he proposed trying to coax her to do so.”

“Is it an old friend of his?” asked Natalie.

“Yes, a friend of many years’ standing,” replied Mrs. James, smiling down at her idle hands.

“Do you know her?” continued Natalie, seeing the smile.

“Oh yes, – very well indeed!”

“Do I know her, too?”

“Yes, you know her.”

“Maybe we all know her, – do we?” asked Janet suddenly.

“Yes, – you all know her,” laughed Mrs. James.

“Who can it be?” exclaimed several voices, but Janet tossed her head and smiled knowingly at Mrs. James. The latter placed a finger on her lips for secrecy, and Janet nodded.

Many guesses were given but no one thought of the right name, and Mrs. James refused to divulge the secret. Then so many interesting sights were seen, as they drove swiftly along the Boulevard that runs through the Bronx Parkway and northwards through the pretty country section of Westchester, that the old friend who was to join them later at Green Hill Farm was eclipsed.

After a pleasant drive of less than an hour, Miss Mason turned off the Central Avenue road and followed a cross-country road that ran through the village where the farmers of that part of the country did their shopping and got their mail.

“If this is a village, where are the stores?” asked Natalie.

“I see it!” exclaimed Mrs. James.

“Oh, I see a little house with a few brooms standing on the front stoop. A sign swinging over the door says ‘Post Office,’ – but you don’t mean to say that is our only shop?” laughed Natalie, as she jeered at the general country store.

“That is the ‘Emporium’ for Green Hill,” said Mrs. James.

“No wonder, then, that we’ll have to raise our own food and other necessities,” retorted Natalie humorously.

The girls laughed, for truly the small store had amused them. New York stores were so different!

A mile further on, Mrs. James called to Miss Mason: “We are almost there now. It is the first house on the right-hand side of the road. You can see the towering trees of the front lawn from here.”

Instantly every pair of eyes looked eagerly down the road and saw the fine big trees mentioned by Mrs. James. In a few minutes more the car was near enough to permit everyone to glimpse the house.

“Jimmy was right! It is an old peach of a place!” declared Natalie delightedly, as she took in the picture at a glance.

“Oh!” exclaimed Miss Mason. “What a treasure, Natalie! Genuine old Colonial, Mrs. James. I shouldn’t wonder if it stood when Washington led his army across this land to reach Dobb’s Ferry. Even the old hand-made shingles are still siding the house.”

“Yes, I heard it was a Revolutionary relic that was as well preserved as any house around here. You see the fine old front entrance? With its half-moon window over the door and the hood for protection from storms? Even the old stoop and the two seats flanking the door, on each side, are the old ones.”

“Dear me! To think this gem has been Natalie’s right along, and no one knew of it!” cried Belle, who loved antiques and vowed she was going to be a collector some day.

“Not that alone, Belle, but think how Nat balked at coming here to spend this summer!” laughed Janet.

“Well, but – I hadn’t an idea of what it was like,” said Natalie apologetically.

“The Law that is the basis of all national laws, says ‘Ignorance of the Law is no excuse for a criminal,’” quoted Miss Mason, smiling at Natalie.

“But, now, once I’ve seen it, I will confess I like it,” Natalie admitted.

Miss Mason now drove the car through the gate which Norma had opened, and the automobile drew up to the side door where a long piazza ran the length of the wing. The moment the car stopped the girls sprang out in haste, to run about and see the place. But Natalie stood still on the lowest step of the piazza and gazed in at an open door.

“Someone’s here!” whispered she to her friends.

Before anyone could reply, a buxom form filled the doorway and a wide grin almost cleft Rachel’s face in half. She held out both hands to Natalie, and her expression signified a welcome to her “Honey-Chile.”

“Why! Rachie! How did *you* get here? I left you at home!” exclaimed Natalie, not certain whether it was flesh and blood she saw, or a phantom.

“Diden I come by a short cut, Honey, an’ wa’n’t it a good joke on you-all to beat you to dis fahm!” laughed Rachel, delighting in the mystery.

“Oh, now I know! It was Rachel who is our friend, eh?” shouted Natalie, clapping her hands.

“Shore! Mr. Marwin done brung me in his speeder by d’ Hudson Riber Turnpike. We turned offen d’ main road afore we come t’ Dobb’s Ferry. Jus’ d’ udder side f’om Yonkers. Dat’s how we come so quick,” explained Rachel.

“Where is he? I want to thank him, Rachel!” cried Natalie, gratitude uppermost in her thought just then.

“You won’t have far to go to find me,” laughed a genial voice, and everyone turned to see Mr. Marvin standing behind them.

Then followed a visit indoors, with Mr. Marvin acting as guide from attic to cellar, and his party stringing out behind. Some loitered in a room, and then ran to catch up with the main guard. Or some lingered to admire a view or interesting object in the house, and hurried after the others later, for fear of missing something worth while.

The main hall ran from front to rear of the house, cutting it in half. On one side of the wide hallway was a “front parlor,” and back of it the back-parlor, or “settin’-room,” as the farmers called it. Across the hall was the dining-room and pantry, and leading from the pantry was the kitchen. These rooms were so spacious that Janet laughingly remarked: “Our entire apartment would go in one room.”

“Look at the wonderful fireplaces!” exclaimed Belle.

“My! One can throw a log three feet long on the fire and not strike either side of the chimney,” added Frances.

“Girls! Just see the funny little cupboards built in on each side of the chimney-facing,” called Norma, opening one of the panels that fitted snugly to the bricks.

Everyone called attention to a different discovery. Janet laughed at the small wavy-glass window panes, that twisted the scene outdoors into grotesque views. Natalie marvelled at the great dark beams overhead that were not only hand-hewn from the timber, but also hand-planed. Mr. Marvin drew attention to the wooden pegs used in the corners of these beams, and the crude nails that a Colonial blacksmith had beaten into a form that could be used by the home-builder of the house.

“It is all so wonderful, Natalie, it seems like a dream!” exclaimed Miss Mason, delighted beyond words.

“Look at the heavy planks in the floors!” said Belle.

“Yes, even the wood in the floors is hand-sawn and smoothed down by hand and sandpaper. These floors will *never* wear out,” said Mr. Marvin.



“Such a room ought to have sand on the floor instead of carpet. Picture this old house furnished, attic to parlor, in strictly old-time style, low wooden beds, high-boys, clothes-presses, and patchwork quilts adorning the foot of the beds; in the front hall, a small stand to hold the hand-dipped candles and sticks; a few braided mats in the ‘company room’ and in the hall, but not in the other rooms; and sand, – glistening white sand, – sprinkled over these floors every few days, and then washed out when the dust demands it.”

As Miss Mason pictured the scene of the interior after the old Revolutionary period, everyone saw how lovely such a plan would be. When they followed Mr. Marvin up-stairs and saw the extensive view from the landing of the stairs, Mrs. James said: “Here we must have a seat, so one can sit and study the lovely, peaceful scene that stretches away over the hills.”

The second floor had been divided into six rooms, with ample closet space in each. A modern bathroom had been installed a few years before by the tenant who had agreed to make all improvements and repairs at his own expense.

“Why! These bedrooms have electric lights in them!” exclaimed Natalie, thus drawing attention to the drop-lights.

“I didn’t see any down-stairs,” said Mrs. James.

“Did anyone think to look for them?” asked Miss Mason.

“No, we were all trying to see your old homestead with hand-dipped candles. The light they gave us was so dim we had no way of seeing the electric lights,” laughed Natalie.

“I’m going down-stairs this minute, and assure myself if there are any,” declared Miss Mason.

“No one would have them up-stairs and not have them on the first floor,” said Mr. Marvin.

While the others went to the attic to revel in a real old-time spot, Miss Mason went down to the first-floor rooms to hunt for electricity. To her astonishment she found how cleverly the late tenant had arranged it. That he had a keen appreciation of the house was evident in many ways, but in none so plainly as in the lighting.

On top of each old-fashioned wooden mantel that crowned the fireplaces, at the end of each mantel-board shelf, Miss Mason found the plug for an electric fixture sunken on a level with the wood of the shelf. And on each side of the door opposite the fireplace, she found that the old-fashioned candlestick fixtures that had been admired as genuine Colonial bits, had been wired and were ready for a bulb. Also she discovered that a wall-plug was cleverly set in the high base-boards on either side of the room. From these one could run the wire for a table lamp, or a floor lamp, as preferred.

She hastened up-stairs to tell the others about it, but when she reached the second floor, such shouts of delight came from the attic, she could not resist the curiosity to go up.

“Miss Mason! Miss Mason!” shouted Natalie, the moment she saw the teacher’s head appear above the stairway. “Just see what we found!”

“The very old pieces that Natalie’s grandmother used!” added Belle, pulling Miss Mason across the floor.

“Isn’t it all like a fairy tale, Miss Mason?” laughed Janet, eagerly clasping her hands in her excitement.

Mrs. James and Mr. Marvin were dragging great heavy pieces of mahogany from under the eaves, and the several objects already brought to view were being dusted, duly examined and admired by the young girls.

Miss Mason saw one fine old high-boy and another old low-boy. The foot-boards of three mahogany beds were already out on the floor, and the two discoverers were working hard to pull out the other sections of the beds. Miss Mason immediately went to work to bring to light some old rush-bottomed chairs which were so covered with cobwebs and dust that one could scarcely see them under the dark eaves.

When lack of breath caused the three eager workers to desist and rest for a short time, an inventory was made. Natalie joyously called out the items while Mr. Marvin wrote them down.

“Two low-boys; three high-boys; one side-board; five dining-room chairs with haircloth covered seats; one round extension table; nine odd chairs with rush-bottoms; four wash-stands of mahogany, with basin-holes and under-shelf for ewer of water; four complete mahogany fourposter beds, with rope webbing for springs; one damaged four-poster bed; box of old candle-sticks, and snuffers, etc.”

“To think that this wonderful old collection of Colonial furniture was here all these years and the tenants never took them, or used them!” exclaimed Janet.

“That goes to show how honest they were,” added Norma.

“The finding of this old family furniture certainly is opportune,” remarked Mr. Marvin. “With these pieces as a start, you can add to the collection from time to time. I should advise you to keep only such pieces from the city home, Natalie, as will harmonize with old Colonial things. Also retain any intimate objects, but sell all the rest that is only suitable for New York apartments.”

As they all went down-stairs again, Miss Mason remembered the electric fixtures in the rooms on the first floor.

When she told of the admirable manner in which the wires had been run to bring out the best results, in keeping with the type of room, Mrs. James was surprised.

“I would never have thought a farmer had enough educated judgment to do it. It only proves how we *mis*-judge them by considering a farmer an ignorant individual who does nothing but grub on his farm.”

“Mos’ time you-all come down f’om dat garret. I done call an’ *call*, ’til my lungs bust open. My goodness! dat fine lunch mos’ spiled, now!” Rachel stood at the foot of the old stairs, glowering up at the delinquents who had never heard a sound from her while they were in the attic.

“Oh, Rachel! We found the loveliest things up in the attic! Just think, Rachie, my very own great-grandmother’s mahogany furniture was tucked away under the dark eaves, and Jimmy found it!” cried Natalie, catching hold of Rachel’s fat hands and shaking them excitedly.

“Is dat so, Honey?” gasped Rachel, forgetting all about the luncheon and the tardy guests.

“Uh-huh! And we are going to keep everything in the old house strictly Colonial, so it will look like a picture,” said Natalie, leading the way to the side verandah where the luncheon had been spread upon newspaper.

Everyone was hungry and Rachel’s viands were always tempting, so full justice was done the sandwiches and other good things provided. Rachel bustled about with importance, as she waited on her “chillun” and insisted upon Mr. Marvin having a third cup of tea. Had she but known the truth – he never took tea in the city, but dearly liked strong black coffee after a meal.

“Now you-all kin clar out and see th’ fahm whiles I do up the leavin’s f’om lunch. Run down an’ see d’ riber an’ what fine woods we got acrost d’ paster-lot. You’ll fin’ plenty to see an’ keep you busy ’til I finishes cleanin’ up,” said Rachel.

Miss Mason was intensely interested in the woods that formed a boundary of the property along the riverside for a long stretch. Mrs. James understood her interest, but no one else had been taken into the teacher’s confidence. She wished to see possibilities before she spoke of the Patrol of Girl Scouts who were looking for a camp-site.

However, she found everything so desirable that she soon engaged Mr. Marvin in a talk that ended with her having rented a section of woodland for the summer, at a nominal price. She was to give Natalie and her friends certain lessons in scouting and take them on the hikes with the Scouts when they all studied birds, beasts, and other Nature-lore, as part of the consideration.

It was past three o’clock before the inspectors were ready to start back home. Rachel had been sitting on the door-step of the spacious kitchen for a long time before she spied them coming across the fields from the stream.

“Ef you-all ’specks to get back home in time fer dinner, we’s got to get a hustle on, ’s all I say!” grumbled she.

“Hoh! Rachel wants to attend Meetin’ to-night, and she hates being late!” laughed Natalie teasingly.

“Mr. Marvin will get her home all right, long before we are half-way there,” said Mrs. James soothingly.

“Seein’s this comin’ Sunday’ll be my las’ at chu’ch fer a hull summer, yuh can’t wonder I wants to be on time at choir practice t’-night,” remarked Rachel apologetically to Mr. Marvin.

“Of course not! I’ll agree to have you back in the city in a jiffy! And now that I think of it, Rachel, – why should you bother to prepare dinner for us to-day? Let me take the girls out somewhere for one night, and you will have time to get to church early in order to say good-by to all your friends!”

As that was all Rachel wished, – to show the importance of herself and her family who owned such a fine country-place, and brag about it to her bosom friends, – she smiled serenely and sat down in the roadster driven by the lawyer.

The others stood and smiled, too, as they watched Mr. Marvin drive away, and then turned to get into Miss Mason’s car to start back to the city.

## CHAPTER IV – GIRL SCOUT FARMERETTES

Mrs. James sent word to the storekeeper at the Corners, directing him to hire help and send them to Green Hill Farm to clean up the house thoroughly. Also to see that a man mowed the lawns and cleaned up the barns and yards.

Then came the work of selecting the things Natalie wished to keep, and packing them ready to ship to Green Hill. The other furnishings in the apartment would not be sold until after the girl was out. Mr. Marvin said there was no need to cause her any unnecessary heartache.

The second week in June, Mr. Marvin sent word to Mrs. James that the house was ready for occupancy whenever she wished to move out there. Not only was the old furniture placed in the respective rooms, but the pieces that had been shipped from the apartment in New York were also arranged for the time being. The only things to be moved were the trunks and the cases containing the dishes and bric-à-brac which Natalie would keep.

Mrs. James read the letter to Natalie at the breakfast table and said: "The sooner we can get away from here, dear, the better for all. Mr. Marvin can then save a whole month's rent for you, as the owner agreed to cancel the lease when Mr. Marvin explained the circumstances. If we remain to the end of this month, it will take an extra week to dispose of what remains here, and that will necessitate another month's rent if it goes over the first of July."

"Oh, I'll be only too glad to get away from the home where every room and object speaks of dear Daddy!" cried Natalie. "Green Hill is so lovely at this time of the year that I feel as if I could look forward there to meeting Daddy and mother again without feeling any grief at the parting now."

"Then let us say we will start in a day or two!" exclaimed Mrs. James eagerly.

"But what about school, Jimmy? Exams will not come off until the third week, and I don't want to miss any."

"Natalie, maybe we can arrange some way with Miss Mason by which you can take yours without being in school," said Mrs. James.

"I'll see her to-morrow, Jimmy, and if she says I may do it that way, I'll go with you at once."

"If she can't make such an exception in your case, Natalie, we may be able to arrange so you can commute to the city for the few last weeks of school."

The next noon Natalie hurried home with the good news that the Principal had been interviewed and had granted Natalie permission to take her examinations all at one time during the next few days of school, as her average for the year had been so splendid. The fact that she maintained a high standard all year through in her classes showed that she would not fail now in her yearly examinations.

"Oh, but this is good news, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. James joyously.

"Yes, isn't it? If it wasn't for Miss Mason taking the time and interest in me that she does, the Principal would never have listened to my request. It seems rather wonderful to have a teacher who is a real friend, too!"

"We're grateful, no matter through what channel the good came; but I, too, think Miss Mason a good friend to have," remarked Mrs. James.

"She said something to me, as I left this noon, about your telling me of her Scout camp. She laughed and said I would be surprised and – perhaps – annoyed. If it was the latter feeling, I was to consider she owed me a debt that she would try to pay as soon as possible. It sounded so amusing, coming from her to me, who owes her all obligations for what she has done for me, that I am keen to hear what you have to explain."

Mrs. James smiled. "I am sure you will be pleased, Natalie. Miss Mason rented a section of the woodland that runs along the river bank at Green Hill for a camp for her Girl Scout Patrol she told us of. They all expect to go there on the first of July."

"Oh, goody! Isn't that just scrumptious!" cried Natalie delightedly.

"I thought you would like it, but Miss Mason was not so sure that you would welcome her Scouts. The girls are all good girls, but they have not had the money or social advantages that you and your friends have. I told Miss Mason that the sooner all such fol-de-rol was dispelled in a girl's mind the better. And these eight sensible young girls will help dispel the nonsense."

"That's right, Jimmy! Since I find myself thrown on the mercy of the world, I begin to see how unfounded is one's faith in money or position. One day it is yours and the next it is gone!"

"Rather precocious views for so young a maid, Natalie," said Mrs. James, smiling indulgently at her protégée.

Natalie sighed. "Is it not true?"

"True, of course, but you have not proven it to be so yet. You speak from hearsay and from book knowledge. You have not had to make the sorry experience your own yet."

"Why, Jimmy! Don't you call my losses the test?" said Natalie, offended that Mrs. James should consider her limited condition anything less than a calamity.

The lady laughed. "Child, you have a lovely home and land free and clear of debt. It is worth at *least* ten thousand dollars right now. With judicious handling it will be worth four times that sum in a few years. You have Rachel and me to live with you and love and cherish you – as well as protect you. You have Mr. Marvin to take all charge of your business interests, and last, but not least – you have four loyal young friends who stick to you whether you have money or not. This is far from being thrown on the cold mercy of the world!"

Natalie thought deeply over this but she said nothing.

"Well, let's get busy packing, Jimmy! I want to get away this week, if we can."

"Are you not going back for the afternoon session of school?" asked Mrs. James, surprised.

"Didn't I tell you I was free now? I do not have to return except for exams. The classes are only reviewing the last term's work now, so I do not have to report for that."

"Oh, how nice! Then we will get to work at once."

By afternoon of Wednesday, all baggage was out of the apartment, and the three occupants were prepared to leave early in the morning. Mr. Marvin had been notified and he said the key for Green Hill house was at the general store. Mrs. Tompkins would give it to them. Mr. Tompkins had followed his wife's advice and stocked up the kitchen and pantry with whatever groceries Rachel would need to begin with.

"Isn't that thoughtful of the Tompkins, Natalie?" said Mrs. James gratefully.

"Yes, I feel that we will be good friends – the Tompkins and us."

Natalie had informed her schoolmates that she was to go on the nine o'clock local in the morning, and so wished them all good-by that night.

"It isn't really 'good-by,' Nat, because we will all see you again so soon," giggled Norma.

Belle sent Norma a warning glance and explained hastily: "Yes, it is only a few weeks before we will be up on the farm with you."

"Try to fix it, girls, so you can all join me on the farm as soon as school closes," said Natalie.

"That will be fine!" declared a chorus of voices.

So repeated good-bys were said and Natalie wondered why the girls thought it all so funny! The next morning as Mrs. James and Natalie stood in line at Grand Central Station to buy their tickets, four laughing girls pounced upon Natalie, and as many girlish voices said: "Didn't you suspect? How could you believe we would let you go away without sending you off in a royal manner?"

Natalie laughed joyously. “But it isn’t to the North Pole, girls! And it is only a few weeks before you will be there.”

“Never mind! If it is only for a few days, we would see that the railroad company was duly impressed with your importance because of your friends who escort you to the train,” laughed Janet.

Mrs. James had purchased the tickets by this time, and they all started to find Rachel, who was waiting with the baggage. Then they hunted up the particular gate that gave way to the platform of the train they wanted, and passed through in a grand procession.

Rachel was last to pass, and as she tried to force the unwieldy bags through without allowing for the narrow brass rails, she got them stuck. A porter sprang forward to assist her, but she scorned him.

“Whad foh yoh try t’ show off *now*? Ef yoh had any sence in yoh haid, yoh’d seen I cud have used help befoh dis! Clar out, now, and don’ show yoh kinky monkey-face heah ag’in!”

As she puffed out the angry words, Rachel struggled with the baggage, and finally shot through with the release of the knobby portmanteau that held her precious property. The gate-keeper laughed quietly at the discomfiture of the porter who was inordinately proud of his new uniform and brass-corded cap. To be termed a “monkey-face” by an old mammy was past endurance!

The incident caused a merry laugh with the group of girls, and Natalie said: “There, Rachel! I told you to let us carry one or two of your bags, – you were too laden for anything!”

“Da’s all right, Honey! I ain’t lettin’ yoh lug yohse’f to pieces fer me; but dat pickaninny what’s dressed up like a hand organ monkey makes his livin’ by fetchin’ an’ carryin’; so he oughta know his bis’nis, er someone’s got to teach him it.”

As Natalie reached the platform of the train, she stood still to bid her chums good-by again. Suddenly she remembered what had occurred the night before.

“Oh, is that why you laughed when I said it need not be a long good-by?”

“Surely! we had it all planned to come and see you off, and give you consolation in some tangible form because you would be deprived of our gracious company for two weeks,” giggled Belle, holding out a ribbon-bowed box.

“What’s that for?” demanded Natalie, trying to act impatient because the girls spent their money on her. But her acting was very poorly done.

“And I thought you would need some farming implements at Green Hill, so I managed to secure these for you,” added Janet laughingly.

She held out a long package that defied guessing as to its contents, so Natalie took it and laughed merrily with the others.

“And I brought your favorite nourishment, Nat. One of mother’s ‘chocolate’ layercakes,” said Norma.

“Oh, my goodness! How shall I carry it without mashing the icing?” exclaimed Natalie, managing, however, to place the square box upon her arm where it was carefully balanced.

“And I, Nat,” said Frances, “feared you would lack fruit on the farm, and so I tried to start you with a supply from the New York orchards.”

It takes little to make a merry heart laugh, and at each silly schoolgirl speech made with the gift Natalie laughed so heartily that it was contagious.

“All aboard!” called the conductor, consulting his timepiece and waving Mrs. James into the coach.

“Good-by! Good-by!” shouted five girls, and Natalie was bundled into the train and found herself watching the girls as the train receded from the station.

After she was seated and had tested the box of candies Belle had given her, Natalie saw Mrs. James deeply interested in a paper-covered book.

“What’s the name of it?” asked she, handing the candy-box across the aisle to Rachel.

“Looks like candy,” replied Rachel, thinking the girl was speaking to her.

Natalie laughed. "I meant the book, Rachie," explained she.

Mrs. James looked up with a half absentminded manner. "What did you say about the book, dear?"

"I asked you what it was. Who wrote it?"

"Oh, it is the new book 'Scouting for Girls,' that Miss Mason gave me last night. It is certainly very interesting, Natalie."

"Is that the Scout Girls' Manual?" said Natalie, surprised at the thickness of it.

"Yes, and ever so good! It is filled, from cover to cover, with wonderful information. I never dreamed so much could be found in Nature that is so absorbing to read about or study."

"I wonder why Miss Mason did not give me a copy?" was Natalie's rejoinder.

"She spoke of it. She said she would send it by one of the girls this morning. Didn't you get it?" asked Mrs. James.

"I wonder if it is in that box?"

As she spoke, Natalie began undoing the cord that wrapped the long box, and having removed the paper and then the box-cover, she found not only the Manual inside, but a hand-trowel and a weeder.

"Of all things!" laughed she, as she held out the box to show Mrs. James. "A shovel and a rake for my garden."

Then it was Mrs. James' turn to laugh. "That is not a shovel, nor is the other a rake, Natalie."

"Oh, isn't it? What is it, then?"

"The trowel is used when you wish to dig shallow holes, or loose-earth trenches. The so-called rake is a weeder that you can use about delicate roots, or in forcing deep roots to let go and come up. Both are very necessary for a farmer to use about his house-garden."

"Well, if I ever have occasion to use them, I shall remember Janet."

"Then you will be remembering her every day this summer, I think," laughed Mrs. James. "Weeds are the pest of a farmer's existence."

Natalie was soon absorbed in her Scout book also, and Rachel was the only one of the trio who could tell about the scenery they passed as the train sped on to the nearest station to the secluded little village near the farm.

As the three travellers left the train and stood on the old platform of the country station, Natalie gazed about.

"My goodness! What a desert for isolation. Not a human being in sight, and no sign of a house or barn. Nothing but glaring sign-boards telling us where to stop in New York for a dollar per night – private bath extra!" exclaimed she.

Mrs. James laughed. It was true, but it sounded funny the way Natalie spoke.

"We ain't got to walk, has we, Mis' James?" asked Rachel plaintively.

"I don't see anything else to do, Rachel. Do you?"

"Not yet, but mebbe someone'll come along. I'd jes' as soon ride behin' a mule es not. Th' misery in my spine is *that* bad sence I've be'n packin' and movin' so hard all week."

"A mule would be welcomed, but there is none," laughed Natalie.

"Isn't the landscape beautiful?" said Mrs. James, gazing about with admiring eyes.

"As long as it is all that is beautiful to look at at this station, I must agree with you, Jimmy," teased Natalie.

But both of them now saw Rachel staring down at the dusty road that ran past the platform, and when she dropped her bags and started along the road, acting in a strange manner, Mrs. James whispered nervously to Natalie.

"What can be the matter, Natalie? Can anything have made her brain turn?"

Rachel kept on going, however, bending over and staring at the dust in the middle of the road. Natalie was dumbfounded at such queer behavior, and was about to call to the colored mammy,

when Rachel suddenly stopped, straightened up and shouted at something hidden from the eyes of the two who were waiting with the bags.

“Heigh dere! Come back foh us, yoh hackman!” was the echo that was wafted back to the station and the patient waiters.

Both of them laughed heartily. And Natalie said: “That was what she was doing! Obeying Scout instructions the first thing, and ‘tracking a horse’ in the wilds of this land.”

“Maybe that is the cab Mr. Marvin ordered to meet us. He said we must not be discouraged if it turned out to be a ‘one-horse chaise’ instead of a taxi,” remarked Mrs. James, highly amused at the experience.

Natalie made a vicious slap at a green bottle-fly that had annoyed her ever since she alighted from the train. Now she laughed and said: “Not a one-horse chaise, Jimmy, but ‘one horse-fly’ is here to meet us.”

It was such an opportune play on words that they both laughed merrily. Rachel was now found to be arguing with a man seated in an antique vehicle. He seemed to enjoy the conversation immensely, for he was comfortably stretched out with his feet up over the dashboard and his arms resting along the top of the back of his seat.

“Let’s go over and add our persuasions to Rachel’s,” said Natalie, picking up her luggage and starting away.

When they drew near enough to hear the conversation between Rachel and the man, the former was saying: “Yuh don’t know what I kin do to yoh! Do yuh want to see my pow’ful arm?”

The driver sat up at that and looked at the doubled up thickness of that member of Rachel’s anatomy. Then he said: “But I always gits that much a head fer such a long trip.”

“What’s the matter here?” demanded Natalie, coming up to join in the argument.

“Chile, dis highway robber wants to take fifty cents a haid fer takin’ us acrost to Green Hill Fahm. Why, it ain’t no funder’n f’om heah t’ dere, an’ I tells him it is stealin’. In Noo York sech profiteers gits what’s comin’ t’ ’em.”

Mrs. James interpolated at this. “Fifty cents each is not too much, Rachel. But he must take the luggage as well.”

The colored woman retreated at that, and cabby chuckled. “How much baggage?”

“Three suit-cases and these bags and hat-boxes.”

“I don’t see no suit-cases,” mumbled he.

“You would, if you had been at the station where you belong. The station-man took the checks and turned the bags over to us before going away to enjoy himself until the next train comes in,” retorted Natalie, impatiently.

“All right; I’ll wait fer yuh ’til yuh git back,” agreed the driver, preparing to take things easy again.

“See here,” said Mrs. James, sternly. “Are you Amity Ketchum?”

“Yes’um, – at your service.”

“Then you’re the man our lawyer engaged to meet the train and drive us to Green Hill. Now stop your arguing and get those suit-cases, then take us to our home.”

Mrs. James’ erstwhile good-nature turned like the proverbial worm and she became very imperious. So much so, that lazy Amity chirruped to his horse and went back for the baggage. When he returned and stopped beside the ladies, Mrs. James got in and sat on the back seat that was adjustable to meet demands. Natalie got in and sat beside her, and Rachel laboriously climbed up and dropped into the vacant seat beside the driver. The entire vehicle cracked when her ponderous weight fell upon the old bench, and Amity scowled threateningly at her black, shiny face.

“I gotta stop at Tompkins’ fer some groceries,” grumbled Amity, with scant ceremony in his tones.



There was silence for the time it took to reach the “Emporium” at the Corners, but when the proprietor hurried out to welcome the city people, the latter smiled and felt better for his friendliness. Amity had gone inside to get his order filled, and then came out with arms laden with packages.

Mrs. Tompkins followed her customer out to the steps, and was introduced by her husband to the three strangers. She was very pleasant and told Mrs. James to call upon her for anything she needed or wanted done. After thanking the gracious woman, Mrs. James was about to ask her advice on an important matter, but the hackman gave his horse a cut with the hickory stick, and almost dislocated his passengers’ necks with the lurch given the vehicle.

The two storekeepers were left standing on the steps watching the buckboard pass out of sight. Mrs. James was angry, but said nothing more. She knew how Rachel’s temper was instantly kindled when anyone dared to offend a member of her revered family, and she understood just what Amity would get if he was not more considerate towards them.

Having driven little less than a mile along the good highway, Amity suddenly turned off into a rough, badly-kept country road. Mrs. James looked anxiously back, and on each side, then said: “Mr. Ketchum, this is not the road to Green Hill Farm. You should have kept right on that other road.”

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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